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Contending with Space and Time:

The Navigation of Class, Marriage, and  
Identity by Chinese Temporary Migrants  
in the UK

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## ABSTRACT

The dominant discourses on young Chinese middle-class transnational migration, especially in the form of educational migration to developed western countries, view such movement as part of personal and family strategies to accumulate various types of capital (Bourdieu 1986), maintain and enhance social mobility, and achieve “flexible citizenship” (Ong 1999; Ley 2010; Tsang 2013). Existing literature celebrates fluid hypermobility and considers it an essentially positive experience for young migrants. This thesis contributes a more nuanced analysis by exploring how visa-induced temporalities restrict migrants’ mobility, divert their plans and aspirations, and structure their everyday lives and life transitions, even for those who are considered to be relatively well-resourced.

This thesis examines the complex trajectories of young middle-class temporary migrants from mainland China and Hong Kong to the UK, including their class-related aspirations and experiences of multiple transitions across marital and immigration statuses. It challenges common assumptions in scholarly work about the transnational mobility of middle-class young people, including that consolidating class status is merely a goal and expected outcome of their trajectories (Tu 2016; Tsang 2013; Waters 2002). It argues that class has a temporal element (Wright and Shin 1988); class is an embodiment of both the past and possible future in the present. The temporalities of migration and the temporality of class simultaneously shape Chinese temporary migrants’ class identity in the UK, where there are different rules of attaining class status, and different perceptions of the values of social, cultural, and symbolic resources than in China or Hong Kong. This thesis unpacks migrants’ reflections of class, their self-fashioning, and how this process of constructing class identity is constrained by a set of socially acceptable categories and definitions.

Drawing on data from in-depth qualitative interviews, this thesis reveals that the ways in which migrants seek to build capital or achieve goals are highly gendered. It focuses on marriage as a migration and class strategy utilised primarily by female migrants. However, contrary to a significant number of studies centred on the entanglement of interest and emotion in the romantic relationships of migrants from

a lower socio-economic background (Brennan 2004; Cheng 2010), this research contributes to discussions of middle-class sexuality as a site of ambivalences where love and pragmatism intersect (c.f. Charsley 2005).

My research findings demonstrate that the British visa regime, the institution of marriage, and the Chinese state-sponsored gender discourse of *sheng nu* (“leftover women”) together shape migrant women’s desire for, timing of, and decisions relating to marriage and family formation. Moreover, this research advances empirical understanding of the intersections between institutional, biographical, and everyday timescales (Robertson 2018) in producing specific experiences for migrants. This study examines how the temporal dynamics of migration have a fundamental effect on the choices available to middling migrants in employment and life transitions, shaping the rhythms of romantic relationships, and accelerating discussions about marriage and the future with their partner.

This thesis further argues that young migrant women’s negotiations of marriage and class status are related to the modern notion of Chinese feminine respectability, which requires them to fulfil familial, societal, and self-imposed expectations to become a respectable middle-class individual and family member. It discusses the paradoxes embedded in the feminisation of success (Lahad 2013) and migrants’ conflicted desires to achieve physical mobility, social mobility and security through transnational marriage and to become a liberal, independent, professional woman. It investigates how women resist the stigma surrounding the notion of “marriage migrant” and (re)establish their middle-classness through the discourses of love and sacrifice, and by asserting their cultural and moral ascendancy over women who they perceive as lower class. Moreover, it examines how migrants’ class background, lifestyle, and ability to draw on financial resources from family members are significant in negotiating power within their relationship and compensating for a potential status loss as a “sponsored spouse”, especially for those who also fail to thrive in the British labour market. This work joins the scholarly literature that addresses the contradictory demands on middle-class women today to construct successful portfolios in both family life and careers, and adds to broader knowledge surrounding their agency, dilemmas, and choices in a transnational setting.



## LAY SUMMARY

This thesis presents a study of young middle-class Chinese temporary migrants to the UK from mainland China and Hong Kong, who often begin their migration journeys as international students or working holiday makers. Based on data collected during 67 in-depth interviews with migrants, it traces the various routes taken when they extend their stays in the UK for longer than their original visas permit, and discusses the difficulties faced in achieving their aspirations through the visa-sponsored employment path, despite high levels of education and family resources.

A common assumption within the rich literature on transnational migration is that migrants aim and expect to achieve enhanced social mobility through migration. However, this thesis argues that migration in fact changes the way that individuals understand and experience class, as they tend to perceive forms of capital, such as lifestyle and qualifications, differently in a new country. It demonstrates that migrants' class trajectory is a constant work-in-progress that requires them to look backward and forward, and compare themselves to their immobile peers "back home" or those born or settled permanently in the UK, who are perceived to take on more fixed, conventional pathways.

This thesis reveals that the ways in which migrants seek to build capital or achieve goals are highly gendered. It focuses on marriage as a migration and class strategy utilised primarily by female migrants. However, contrary to a significant number of studies that examine the instrumental sexual relationships of sex workers or those of a lower socio-economic status, this research seeks to contribute to the more limited body of work on middle-class migrants, who are often perceived to have more resources and higher capabilities.

Migration and life-course journeys are interwoven. This thesis argues that marriage is more than just a gendered migration strategy for middle-class migrants, but is related to their age, life stage, and personal goals, particularly in relation to career, social mobility, romance, and family. It argues that visa policy, the institution of marriage, and Chinese state-supported ideas surrounding gender roles together shape migrant women's desire for, timing of, and decisions relating to marriage and

family formation. The British visa regime determines the duration of time that a temporary migrant is allowed to stay; the institution of marriage facilitates a social expectation to marry; and the Chinese state's gender discourse *sheng nu* stigmatises women's singlehood and directs them towards the goal of marriage. This thesis examines how the time-related dynamics of migration have implications for the choices available to migrants, forcing them to undertake careful planning and calculation regarding employment and life transitions, and shaping the rhythms of romantic relationships, such as by accelerating discussions between partners about marriage.

This thesis proposes that young migrant women's desires to fulfil familial, societal, and self-imposed expectations to become a respectable middle-class individual and family member are related to the modern notion of Chinese feminine respectability. It discusses migrants' conflicted goals of achieving physical mobility, social mobility and security through transnational marriage and becoming a liberal, independent, professional woman. It investigates how women resist the stigma surrounding the notion of "marriage migrant" and (re)establish their middle-classness by justifying marriage migration to the UK as a choice rather than a necessity, distancing themselves from women whom they perceive as manipulative, lower-class and not respectable, and asserting a higher moral ground through the discourses of love and sacrifice. Moreover, it shows that despite the perceived dangers of lowering their status by becoming a "sponsored spouse" in the visa system and generally experiencing failures and disappointment in the British labour market, migrants' class background, lifestyle, and ability to draw on financial resources from family members allow them to negotiate power within their relationship and compensate for a potential status loss. This work examines middle-class migrants' aspirations, constraints, and capabilities in constructing successful portfolios in both their family life and careers, and adds to broader knowledge of the different tensions and dilemmas they experience in a transnational setting.

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encouragement and motivation throughout this time has kept my head up, brought light into darkness and propelled me forward.



## PROLOGUE: THE WEDDING

On a sunny morning in early September 2017, my partner and I attended Kelly and Sam's wedding at a Chinese church in Edinburgh, Scotland. I met Kelly, a mainland Chinese postgraduate student of a Scottish university when I was conducting my anthropological fieldwork in late 2016. Kelly was introduced to me by one of my informants, Sarah. We have been in touch since then.

Stepping into the reception hall, my partner and I were quickly received and surrounded by Kelly and Sam's Chinese friends. They welcomed and directed us to sign the guest book. Most of the signatures and messages were written in Chinese, including one of the most common Chinese wedding wishes, *Bai nian hao he, yong jie tong xin* (Wishing you a lifetime of happiness. May the knot be tied forever). On the table beside the guest book sat a small photo frame containing the engagement photo of the bride and the groom, a white wooden perpetual calendar showing the date of the wedding, and small bunches of flowers. The atmosphere was warm and busy with footsteps and laughter all around. After being given the order of service, a few chocolates and a pink gift bag, I put a red envelope which contained a small contribution towards the newlyweds' honeymoon into a white wooden box. The box was already full of red and white envelopes - wedding gifts that the bride and groom had requested.

Soon afterwards, my partner and I were instructed to stand before a nicely decorated table where a photo display stand was placed for photo-taking. About twenty photos of the bride and groom were displayed here. Some were pre-wedding photos taken in the countryside of Scotland. I could see the couple's lovely smiles against the backgrounds of green fields and the iconic architecture of Edinburgh. From these photos, I could also tell where they had travelled to for holidays in the early days of their relationship. It occurred to me that this was a western-styled wedding with Chinese middle-class characteristics.

After the photo of my partner and I was taken, we were invited to enter the main hall where the wedding ceremony would be held. I was very familiar with the main hall as I had visited it regularly since March 2016 when I had begun my PhD research. I

attended numerous Sunday services and met some of my informants here, who were also friends of Kelly. After exchanging greetings with other wedding guests, my partner and I sat down and took a look at the hall, with its vast stained-glass windows depicting some of the famous scenes from the Bible. Today, the hall looked a bit different than it did at Sunday services. It was decorated with ribbons and ornaments that featured “Mr and Mrs” on them. The guests were mostly young Chinese. Apart from the bride and groom’s mutual Chinese friends from church, the wedding was mainly attended by Kelly’s friends from university and Sam’s friends from work. There were a few white, middle-aged local faces whom I assumed were church friends of the bride and groom.

**Figure 1 Reception hall**



**Figure 2 Photo display table**



At 12.30pm, the wedding ceremony started. As the music gracefully echoed in the hall, the bride was slowly led down the aisle by a Chinese pastor, also a friend of mine. Kelly and Sam exchanged their vows in English, with Kelly struggling a bit with the language. Knowing that it had not been easy for Kelly to study, live and love in the UK, the vows deeply moved my heart. When I heard the Scottish pastor on stage pronounce them husband and wife, I had tears in my eyes. It was beautiful.

*(Hymn)*

*Be still for the presence of the Lord  
The Holy One is here*

A sense of community was felt as we sang the hymn together. I was touched by the fact that I was surrounded by people I had been spending time with for months, whose stories and struggles I knew well. At the same time, my mind travelled to the first time I met Kelly in the winter of 2016, when she told me about her difficulties in adapting to life in the UK. She said,

When I came to this country, I didn't know anyone. I had no friends. I was alone...When other students talk in seminars, I can't understand them. I am not happy with my study life. I get low grades here. I don't have a sense of satisfaction.

Despite all the difficulties and struggles she experienced, it was soon clear to me that Kelly's relationship was the main reason she wishes to stay on in the UK. She had found love here – a man who emigrated from China to Edinburgh for work few years ago. The development of her relationship had been anything but slow. Kelly

and Sam were engaged after having been together for just half a year. They registered their marriage at a registry office in Edinburgh in late February 2017, which was attended by their friends, including myself. I interviewed Kelly in November 2016. At the time, Kelly said to me she knew that she and Sam would have to wait until the summer of 2017 to hold a wedding ceremony in church because no earlier dates were available. However, for immigration and visa application purposes, they decided to register their marriage early. Indeed, Kelly and Sam had a clear and detailed schedule of what and when things needed to be done for them to stay in the country together as a couple. First of all, Sam needed to apply for British permanent residency, which he did in January 2017. Just one month later, Kelly and Sam registered their marriage, even though Kelly's student visa was not due to expire until October 2017. Kelly wanted to get married early to ensure that she had left enough time to switch to a spouse visa in order to avoid the marriage being seen as a rushed or sham marriage by the Home Office. Kelly explained her concern to me,

I knew that if I were to leave the application date of spouse visa too close to the expiry date of my student visa, it would look sceptical in the eyes of the authorities. I heard from one of my friends that her spouse visa application was rejected. She told me it may be because she had left it too late to apply for the visa before her current visa expired.

**Figure 3 Kelly and Sam’s civil ceremony at a registry office**



During the interview, Kelly also told me that she had been purposely attending social events with Sam so that she had photos which could be useful as evidence of their relationship in support of her spouse visa application in the future. I would not be surprised if the photos displayed on the reception desk at the wedding were some of the “evidence” that could be submitted to Home Office, if needed.

While Kelly’s and Sam’s feelings for each other were true and strong, to a certain extent the civil ceremony in February 2017 and the religious ceremony in September 2017 did not happen spontaneously. The timing of such events was shaped by immigration procedures and considerations. In the hope of not being mistaken for a sham marriage, lots of planning and calculation went into the representation of the marriage as genuine according to the Home Office’s standard.

Kelly was a rich young woman who came from an upper middle-class family in China. Sam, on the other hand, was described by Kelly as coming from a relatively humble background (for detail, see chapter 6). Kelly admitted to me that had she not

left for the UK, she would have looked for potential partners within her own class in China. Before moving to the UK, Kelly had a four-year relationship with a man who was close in age to Kelly. The relationship was supported by their respective families who belonged to a similar socio-economic class. In the end, the relationship ended because of Kelly's plan to study abroad, and her ex-boyfriend's reluctance to have a long-distance relationship. According to Kelly, her ex-boyfriend's family was strongly opposed to her study plan, considering it to be too great a risk to have their prospective daughter-in-law wandering on her own in the West for a year.

After breaking up with her ex-boyfriend, Kelly arrived in the UK in August 2015. Soon afterwards, she met Sam.

*(Hymn)*  
*The earth shall soon dissolve like snow*  
*The sun forbear to shine*  
*But God who called me here below*  
*Will be forever mine*  
*Will be forever mine*  
*You are forever mine*

As the wedding ceremony ended, there was a formal photo-taking session during which groups with different relations to the bride and groom took turns for photos. Afterwards, we were directed to the wedding reception for refreshments in the Lower Hall. We enjoyed salads, sandwiches, chicken wings, cupcakes and fruits. I was delighted to see Sarah, my informant who had also got married recently at the same church. She and her husband were both PhD students. After they were engaged, they moved into a new house that their families in China had bought for them. I then spoke to Biyu, another informant who had a Scottish husband. She had given birth to a beautiful son earlier in the year. I was also happy to see Victoria, who had recently returned from a long visit to Hong Kong. Despite marrying a British-born Chinese man (her husband was second-generation Hong Kong Chinese, born in Scotland), Victoria visited Hong Kong frequently to see her friends and family. While having refreshments, Kelly told me that her parents and Sam's parents did not come to the wedding because they planned to throw big wedding banquets in Kelly's and Sam's two home towns in China, which in the eyes of the parents, was more important than attending their wedding in the UK. As we were all full and contented, it was time to dance. Kelly and Sam invited a live

ceilidh band with a caller to guide us through the dance steps. The couple were called to perform the first dance, which they were reluctant to do. One of the musicians seemed to be unimpressed by how shy and inexperienced the couple was, but to me, it was understandable because dancing is not expected at Han Chinese weddings. I myself have never attended a wedding in my hometown, Hong Kong, in which newlyweds or guests dance.

After the first dance, the rest of the guests joined in as instructed by the caller. There were about 20 of us who were mostly Chinese. My partner and I were one of the two interracial couples in the group. We stepped, clapped and spun with the music. As I looked around, I took in the scene before me of young Chinese migrants having a ceilidh dance in a Scottish church – how odd but wonderful.

## INTRODUCTION

The wedding vignette contains all of the themes that this thesis sets out to explore. At the centre of the story are the young, well-educated and middle-class Chinese temporary migrants who hope to pursue a prestigious foreign degree, opportunities for advancement in the English language, the prospect of higher employability, and western experiences in the UK. Along with these study-and-work related transnational goals, a temporary stay in the UK also offers migrants opportunities to explore romance and develop a relationship that may lead to marriage.

This study concerns a relatively privileged and increasingly typical group of Chinese migrants whose socio-economic backgrounds in mainland China or Hong Kong have afforded them the opportunity to see transnational migration not as an economic necessity, but as a vehicle to modernity, cosmopolitanism and the achievement of other aspirations, through the experiences of studying and working holiday making. Temporary movement to the UK itself makes these migrants valuable as it represents forms of personal achievement and satisfaction, self-realisation and independence. My research covers both mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese, but I typically refer to them generally as “Chinese” in this thesis. Unless specifically mentioned, terms such as “Chinese temporary migrants” and “Chinese migrant women” refer to both mainland China and Hong Kong cohorts. I will justify my inclusion of the two groups in the following section.

While it is relatively easy for young Chinese migrants to engage in temporary migration to the UK, opportunities for them to stay on are much harder to come by. Depending on states’ management of immigration, temporary migrants are often subjected to time restrictions imposed by various visas that limit the length of legally permitted stays. Those who have long-term migration goals in the UK actively navigate the possibilities and constraints of achieving higher flexibility and mobility for the life that they desire. During their migration trajectories, they may encounter immigration constraints and post-study employment barriers that prevent them from achieving their goals. Most notably, the Post-Study Work (PSW) visa, which allowed students from outside of the European Economic Area (EEA) to spend two years in the UK after graduation was cancelled in 2012. Student migrants now have a



maximum of four months after the course completion date to switch onto the so-called skilled immigration path. As what constitutes a “skilled migrant” is solely defined by the Home Office, which also sets and raises the income bar for visa sponsorship jobs, even well-educated non-EEA migrants may find it difficult to become eligible for the visa.

In fact, the Home Office is not unaware of the situation that non-EEA migrants face, and how a narrow path to permanent residency through employment may force some migrants to take alternative paths, such as marriage. In describing its 2013 investigation into sham marriages and civil partnerships, the Home Office states that “as the requirements for non-EEA nationals seeking to remain in the UK to work or study have become more selective, it has become more attractive for non-EEA nationals to try to use marriage or civil partnership as a means to remain and settle in the UK” (Home Office 2013).

The entanglement of interest and emotion in marriage strategies and love relationships has been well-studied in the social sciences (see Medick and Sabean 1984), particularly in migration studies (Brennan 2004; Cheng 2010; Parreñas 2011). However, the research focus has largely been on the entanglement of romantic love and the instrumentality of migrants from a lower socio-economic background, not on middling migrants or those who are perceived to have more resources and choices (for an exception, Charsley 2005). This research is therefore original in examining marriage immigration as a strategy of Chinese migrants who may at first appear to possess various forms of capital, and thus contributes to the discussion of middle-class sexuality as a site of ambivalences where love and pragmatism intersect. As this thesis will show, migrants’ strategies are much more complicated than is often assumed; the marriage immigration of middling migrants is more than just a means to an end.

Even in the early stages of the empirical research that underpins this thesis, I discovered that migrant women, as opposed to men, tended to make use of the institution of marriage to enhance their chances of achieving extended stays, engaging in remigration, and obtaining permanent residency. This could be partly explained by the nature of the transnational marriage market, which appears to follow the familiar logic of global hypergamy (Charsley and Shaw 2006; Constable

2003). But more importantly, I realised that migrant women were also more motivated than migrant men to explore romantic opportunities, maintain an existing relationship, or achieve the goal of marrying, while living in the UK temporally in the first place. In contrast, my male informants tended to frame their migration mainly as a journey to accumulate cultural capital and financial resources, and achieve higher social standing. Male narratives emphasised aspirations in career success and prolonged residence through their “own means”, particularly through employment. They expressed less concern about relationships or marriage and afforded themselves more time to remain single before looking for a spouse. The different narratives of female and male informants suggest that migrants’ desires, expectations, aspirations and experiences are highly gendered.

Due to the snowball method of sampling and migrants’ preference in recommending potential informants, the number of migrant women that I interviewed was higher than the number of migrant men. Repeatedly, interviews with women revealed that women’s romantic motivations, experiences and outcomes are significant in shaping their migration trajectories. I also discovered that although migrant women’s entry into the institution of marriage may help them to qualify for the application of family or dependent visas and enhance their chances of achieving extended stays, most of these women are by no means “opportunistic husband-seekers<sup>1</sup>”.

Chinese migrant women’s motivations for exploring romance in the UK vary. Some women in their twenties who were especially concerned about their singlehood felt pressured to look for a marriageable partner and did not mind looking while they lived in the UK temporarily. But I also came across women whose romantic relationships developed spontaneously, and whose entry into marriage was largely a serendipitous outcome. Not every relationship facilitated marriage immigration; and not all married women wanted to live in the UK permanently. Recognising the contradiction and heterogeneity inherent in mobility, I therefore do not wish for this research to be read as an over-simplified and stereotypical study of Chinese migrant women and their “calculative” and “strategic” marriages (Lin 2011). This is not to say that women were unaware of what their relationship could potentially bring, including

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<sup>1</sup> In my analysis, I rely mainly on informants’ narratives, which involve the selective presentation and omission of information.

an extension of their time in the UK. However, this potential benefit alone was often inadequate to persuade women into marriage. In other words, marriage immigration is more than just a gendered strategy.

After (re)analysing my data, I realised that Chinese temporary migrant women's romantic experiences and struggles are often primary elements in their trajectories of migration, class and life. Also, women's decisions and the timing of important life-course events, such as marriage, are influenced by three factors: migration temporalities, new marriage ideals and familial expectations in Chinese societies, and women's desire to achieve feminine respectability. I will consider each of these factors by examining the existing literature and my interview data. In this thesis, I will ask the following overarching questions: What are the forms of agency, opportunities, strategies and constraints of well-educated, middle-class Chinese migrants in prolonging their stays in the UK? How do they navigate different aspects of their personal lives, including class, employment, romance, marriage, and gender expectations?

## EMIGRATION FROM HONG KONG AND MAINLAND CHINA

This thesis studies two groups of migrants – one from mainland China and one from Hong Kong. China is the leading source of international students. In 2015, international students around the world comprised 4.7 million, among which over 800,000 students came from China (UNESCO 2017). As a main destination for overseas education in Europe, the United Kingdom has received a dramatic increase in students from China in the last two decades, from under 3,000 in 1997 (Nyíri 2010, 36) to over 95,000 in 2017 (UK Higher Education Statistics Agency 2018). Students from China now form the largest contingent of international students in the UK, surpassing all countries of the European Union (EU) and the EEA. The number of Chinese students in the UK was five times more than students coming from India (16,550) in 2017 (UK Higher Education Statistics Agency 2018).

In addition to the fast-growing number of student migrants from China, Hong Kong Chinese also comprise a significant number of international students in the UK, with over 16,000 in 2017 (UK Higher Education Statistics Agency 2018). Since 2010,

both China and Hong Kong have been in the top five in terms of countries of student origin, with China always in first place and Hong Kong in fourth or fifth each year (Ibid.; Universities UK 2017). Considering the relatively small population of Hong Kong, with 7 million residents, as compared to 1.3 billion in China, the number of Hong Kong students arriving in the UK seems surprisingly high, and continues to increase steadily each year. Benefitting from the post-colonial relationship between the UK and Hong Kong, Hong Kong nationals are also afforded an additional temporary immigration route in the form of working holiday making, which allows them to stay in the UK for up to two years. This temporary migration trend appears less popular than student migration, with a total of 1,191 Tier 5 Youth Mobility Scheme<sup>2</sup> (YMS) visas issued to Hong Kong nationals in 2016 (Migration Watch UK 2017), however this number does not include those who used a British National Overseas passport<sup>3</sup> for their visa application.

Hong Kong's regional and transnational migration regime has a long history, whereas outmigration directly from mainland China has been a relatively recent phenomenon. Hong Kong has long been a point of transit for would-be migrants and a destination for return migration for generations of Chinese (Abelmann, Newendorp, and Lee-Chung 2014). Watson (1975) looks at the early migration strategies of Hong Kong transnational split families in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with men emigrating abroad, leaving their wife and children in Hong Kong. In the post-1997 era, after the handover of Hong Kong from the UK to China, emigration from Hong Kong has been dominated by middle-class families, economic elites and investor migrants. The transnational split family is still a widespread migration strategy but now Hong Kong husbands tend to remain in Hong Kong to earn money, whilst their wives and children stay living abroad to obtain "flexible

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<sup>2</sup> A Tier 5 (Youth Mobility Scheme) visa is issued to applicants of certain nationalities who want to live and work in the UK for up to 2 years. Hong Kong citizens can use either a British National (Overseas) passport or a Hong Kong passport to apply for the visa, providing certain criteria are fulfilled.

<sup>3</sup> The British National (Overseas) passport, commonly known as the BN(O) passport, was first issued in 1987 after the Hong Kong Act 1985, from which this new class of British nationality was created. According to the British government website, "Someone who was a British overseas territories citizen by connection with Hong Kong was able to register as a British national (overseas) before 1 July 1997. British National (Overseas) passport holders are subjected to immigration controls and do not have the automatic right to live or work in the UK. They are also not considered a UK national by the European Union."

citizenship” (Ong 1999). These families are called “astronaut families”; the term “astronaut” refers to parents (very often husbands) who “shuttle back and forth” between Hong Kong and wherever their spouse and children live overseas (Ho 2002).

In the UK, a lot of early research conceptualising Chinese migration experiences with notions such as Chinese diaspora (Ong and Nonini 1997; Benton and Pieke 1998; Tan 2013) and Chinese transnationalism (Benton 2003), had a focus on the settlement processes of Hong Kong Chinese immigrants in Britain, who opened catering businesses (Holmes 1988; Watson 1975; 1977), laundry businesses (Jones 1980), and established Chinatown (Soon 2012). The significant numbers of young Hong Kong Chinese migrants in the UK, and the important role of Hong Kong in establishing the Chinese diaspora in Britain and developing unique modes of emigration, necessitate the inclusion of Hong Kong migrants in this research.

In contrast to Hong Kong citizens, Chinese nationals were severely constrained in their mobility before the 1980s. In the post-1980s era, life-tenure employment opportunities were replaced by more contractual jobs; the labour market was opened; and national ID cards were introduced, enabling adult Chinese citizens to apply for passports (Xiang 2016). All of these significant policies gradually opened the door to emigration for ordinary Chinese nationals. Working overseas was seen as an alternative employment opportunity for low skilled and unskilled Chinese particularly from the northeast. Moreover, China’s economic transformation significantly contributes to an accumulation of wealth among Chinese urban families, which allows their offspring to undertake transnational student migration, especially to Europe and North America, and consolidate intergenerational transfer of middle-class advantages (Devine 2004) and social reproduction (Bourdieu 1986), just like their Hong Kong counterparts (e.g. Tsong and Liu 2009; Waters 2005). For middle-class Chinese, a foreign degree is also considered as an “intergenerational aspiration transfer” (Tu 2019), which is materialised through Chinese parents’ financial sponsorship. The patterns and flows of Chinese transnational migration have changed rapidly over recent decades. Presently, in the UK, wealthy migrant investors, highly skilled migrants and international students comprise the dominant groups of immigrants from China.

Although mainland China and Hong Kong are distinctly different in many ways, and young migrants from the two cohorts entering the UK are administered and documented differently, their migration aspirations, their education/career trajectories and the time-related conditions of their stays are very similar, which can be related to the general experiences of elite-dominated and education-related migration of Asian migrants in the West (e.g. Robertson 2018). Despite the similarities between my mainland Chinese and Hong Kong informants, there are also differences in practices and expectations of courtship and marriage, and markers of middle-class identity, including career ideals, which are some of the main themes of this thesis. The inclusion of both mainland Chinese and Hong Kong cohorts helps prevent the problem of essentialism in the understanding of Chinese transnationalism. This study contains samples of mainland Chinese who came to the UK as students and people from Hong Kong who came as students or under the working holiday scheme, a migration path that is not available to the mainland Chinese. I have included both groups because I consider both studying and working holiday making to be significant forms of youth mobility undertaken by migrants of a particular education and class background.

## TIME, TEMPORARY MIGRATION AND LIFE-COURSE TRAJECTORY

The majority of Chinese temporary migrants in this study were not first-time visa holders, suggesting their unfixed intentions and changing lengths of stays in the UK. As mobile actors, these migrants constantly shift and blur the boundaries of “temporariness”, “extended temporariness” and “eventual permanence” (Rajkumar et al. 2012). They also perfectly illustrate the fact that migration is a multidirectional, non-linear and temporally contingent process (Geddes 2015; Jeffery and Murison 2011; Parreñas 2010; Wallace 2002).

Theories of space and spatiality have long dominated our understanding of contemporary migration, making time and temporality a marginal analytical framework (May and Thrift 2001). Traditional understandings of international migration have also seen the processes from alien to citizen, and from arrival to assimilation in terms of a linear journey (Meeus 2012). But scholars of migration

have now recognised that migration is often not a “simple journey from A to B” (Schrooten, Salazar, and Dias 2015, 1200–1201); it has varied tempos and rhythms. This understanding also changes our perception of the boundaries between categories of migrants such as temporary/permanent, and sojourner/settler.

In recent years, there has been emerging theoretical and empirical interest in the temporalities of international migration. As early as the 1970s, Hägerstrand (1970) developed the theory of *time geography*, in which he traced time-paths across a range of temporal scales, from one day to a lifetime. *Rhythmanalysis*, a concept originally developed by Lefebvre (2004), has recently been rediscovered and adopted by King and Lulle (2015) and Marcu (2017) to understand temporal rhythms and patterns in mobility, and the use of time in everyday life. Cwerner's (2001) study of the “times of migration”, probably one of the most cited works in the field, suggests that all migration processes have complex temporal dimensions and offers a comprehensive theoretical review of migration, time and temporalities. “Times of migration” concern not only the flows and movements of people, but also the rhythms and cycles, the synchronicity and disjuncture, and the future (see Acedera and Yeoh 2018; Griffiths, Rogers, and Anderson 2013; Robertson and Ho 2016).

Among the limited range of empirical work that has focused on temporality and migrant experiences, “waiting” in relation to marginal immobility, including asylum seekers and displaced people, is one of the central themes (Bendixsen and Eriksen 2018; Haas 2017; Richards and Rotter 2013; Rotter 2016). Robertson (2018, 173) claims that there has been inadequate literature on migration and time in relation to the experiences of middling or skilled migrants. While I do agree that we need more studies regarding middling migrants, I am not totally in line with Robertson's criticism, which seems to imply that studies of asylum seekers and displaced people neglect middling migrants. In my view, she fails to see that this kind of literature also includes a large proportion of individuals from middle-class backgrounds. I consider that Robertson's (2018) understandings, generalisation and categorisation of different groups of migrants is largely based on the economic and social situation of their country of origin, but not the social position or education of individual migrants.

Migrants' desires are complex, temporary, multiple, and sometimes contradictory. Although international education migration and working holiday making are

sometimes understood as a particularly “discrete period of life” or a “time out” from the life-course, when migrants aim to accumulate certain qualifications or skills for the future (Griffiths, Rogers, and Anderson 2013), for some migrants, this temporary movement may have greater consequences, shaping life-course events, decisions and disruptions (King et al. 2004). A life-course is defined as “a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time” (Giele and Elder 1998, 22).

Adopting a life-course approach (Elder and Giele 2009) in migration (for other examples see Findlay et al. 2015; Gardner 2009), I consider the mobility of young Chinese temporary migrants as situated within a much broader structure of social processes. A life-course perspective in migration research concerns how the timing of significant life-course events, such as marriage, the birth of a child, moving home and the transition of migrants into family life is shaped by the temporalities of migration. Scholars have observed that emotional and material needs are strongly linked to stages of an individual’s life cycle (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002), and that the timing of a life-course event concerns the biography of an individual at that particular moment, for example his or her age (Settersten and Mayer 1997). This is especially relevant to my study of young Chinese migrants, especially women, who during their twenties were in a particular life stage, and tended to be interested in developing a relationship with a view to marriage.

Robertson (2018) argues that research on middling migrants seldom expands beyond the model of institutional forms of temporal control in the structuring of these migrants’ experiences, an area which this research hopes to address. Following Robertson’s (2018, 174) concept of “timescale”, which “describes different levels of temporal orderings and events that impact on and interact with migrants’ mobilities across space”, I will analyse the interplay between the institutional time of immigration constraints (Bauböck 2011), migrants’ biographic time, and everyday lived time in their migration and romantic trajectories.

Migrants’ biographic time has a gendered dimension. Cieslik (2013) argues that migrant women often negotiate family building decisions alongside transnational mobility. Robertson (2018) also states that women may delay the transition from singlehood to marriage and motherhood due to the uncertainty entailed in their



temporary migration trajectories. In this thesis, I will argue that the gender discourse of *sheng nu* (leftover women) sponsored by the Chinese state, which encourages marriage and reproduction through stigmatisation of women's singlehood, adds an additional temporal scale in migrants' lived experiences.

Focusing on the complications between individual and institutional framings of time (Lingard and Thompson 2017; Robertson 2018), this thesis argues that life-course time is structured, gendered and monitored by visa and marital institutions, and state bureaucracy (Lauser 2008; Thomas and Bailey 2009). I will scrutinise how migrant women are pressured to explore romance, find a partner and decide to marry within a limited window of time, both in the sense of the limited time remaining on their visas and the prime age bracket to secure a marriageable partner in a woman's life-course. I argue that women's migration trajectories and state of temporariness intersect with their gender identities and marital statuses, shaping their everyday lived time and affecting the rhythms of their romantic relationships.

In this thesis, I will also illustrate the interrelation between the various modalities of socially constructed time, for example individual time, family time, historical time, and state-controlled time in the context of temporary migration. Lastly, I will show that time is conceptualised as forms of commodity, capital, commitment, and reward in migration and citizenship regimes, through which migrants are stratified; and gender and class inequalities are reinforced.

## CHINESE WOMEN, MARRIAGE AND CLASS

Chinese kinship patterns are described by anthropologists, such as Fei Xiaotong (1992), as patrilineal and patriarchal, meaning that descent is traced through the male line, with men holding more power over women, parents over children, and old over young. While these kinship patterns have not changed, some of the radical social transformations that have spread through China in the last few decades have greatly affected the Chinese patrilineal system in terms of marriage, gender relationships, and intergenerational relationships.

In China, the 1950 Marriage Law is often considered by social scientists as the key law that demonstrates the Communist Party's ideals of gender liberation, and its support of the ideas of romance, divorce, and the abolition of arranged marriage (see, for example Cong 2016; Friedman 2006; Zhao 1966). At the end of 1950s, "love" became a key ideology in China. Passionate feelings and emotional expressions in courtship relationships were appreciated. Young people were given a certain degree of freedom to choose their marriage partner. However, premarital sex remained a social taboo throughout the 1980s, and women were continuously expected to limit sexual intimacy, and were shamed if they lost their virginity before marriage or experienced premarital pregnancy (Friedman 2006; Davis 2014). Since the post-Mao period, the Communist Party's "one-child" policy and the market culture have driven changes in attitudes to sex and ideologies of marriage and intimate behaviours in many ways. An individualist culture of dating became more prevalent; sexual intercourse as an expression of love was normalised; and premarital sex, breaking up, and cohabitation became socially acceptable (Davis 2014; Farrer 2014; Yan 2003). However, a woman's marriage prospects today are still related to her sexual conduct (Fang 2013).

The revision of the Marriage Law in 1980 designated minimum marriageable ages for men and women, which according to scholars, such as Cai and Feng (2014), and Zhang and Sun (2014), marked the beginning of the "late marriage" era. They argue that the "late marriage" era was at first a product of the state's intervention in the institution of marriage, but later on young Chinese men and women chose to marry later due to the expansion of higher education, and the highly competitive global environment and job market. However, for most women and men in this study, marriage and family formation are still considered to be life goals that are expected to be fulfilled.

In Hong Kong, the expectations and realities of marriage have changed dramatically over the past fifty years because of changing socio-economic circumstances under a neoliberal and market-oriented economy, making the city in many ways parallel what scholars have observed in Europe and North America (Ting 2014). Since the 1960s, young people in Hong Kong have had greater autonomy in choosing a potential spouse (Mitchell 1972). The expansion of tertiary education in the post-

1980 era has contributed to an increase in the number of women completing post-secondary studies and lower rates of marriage in Hong Kong.

In both mainland China and Hong Kong, marriage remains a key site through which class status is made and performed. Although the rise of individualisation and the normalisation of “romantic love” have made “free-choice” marriages a social ideal (Yan 2003; 2013), the choice of marriage continues to be related to problems of stratification and socio-economic differentiation based on material interests (Farrer 2002), household registration (*hukou*) status, educational level, and appearance (Wang and Nehring 2014).

Previous research has looked at how China’s *hukou* system creates a segregated and hierarchical context that makes it rare for rural-urban intimate interactions to happen (Lui 2017). Introduced in the 1950s, *hukou* status is a form of household registration attached to places assigned by the state. The *hukou* system categorises people according to their parents’ place of origin into “agricultural” or “non-agricultural” households. It divides the “rural” population (those with agricultural registration) from the “urban” population (those registered in large towns or cities). Also, it separates “locals”, meaning those who have local registration, from outsiders (Nyiri 2010). Social rights such as education, health care, social welfare and housing are all tied to *hukou*; ways to change one’s *hukou* remain restricted (Jacka, Kipnis, and Sargeson 2013). This is why Solinger (1999) argues that the *hukou* system creates two fundamentally binary Chinese citizenships.

Not surprisingly, in my study, none of my Chinese informants were rural *hukou* holders. The *hukou* system determines the socio-economic and cultural hierarchy of different groups, creates opportunities and obstacles for them to succeed in various aspects of their lives, and favours more resourceful urban men and women, and occasionally beautiful rural women, in dating and marriage markets (Wang and Nehring 2014). For some of my Chinese informants, although foreign citizenship brought by transnational marriage may seem attractive, marriage abroad presents the same perceived risks of *métissage* as rural-urban marriage at home.

Despite of rapid social changes, marriage, reproduction and care for family members are still expected from Chinese women, regardless of their career

achievement. In mainland China and Hong Kong, women's singlehood is often perceived as problematic. Single women who are generally well-educated and financially empowered, but fail to live meaningfully in a society that expects them to marry and care for a family, receive social criticism and stigma. The term *sheng nu* (leftover women) is now widely used to describe these women, who are considered to be too old (usually approaching or have already passed the age of 30) and not desirable by men. As I will argue in the next chapter, the defining line of the age of 30 is vitally important for Chinese women. Those who are approaching it or have passed it may feel insecure about their disfavoured position in the local marriage market and may seek alternative romantic opportunities overseas.

#### CHINESE WOMEN'S EDUCATION MIGRATION AND CLASS TRAJECTORIES

The young middle-class migrant women from urban China and Hong Kong in this study were born in a historical time that allowed them to benefit from a concentration of family resources and overseas educational opportunities (see Fong 2011). In China, the "one-child" birth control policy that was implemented in 1979 and officially ended in 2015 has shifted intra-family power relations from older generations to young adults, and changed the ways in which Chinese families raise daughters, especially in the cities (Kajanus 2015).

Although China's birth control policy was never carried out in Hong Kong, the city's fertility rate (1.13 in 2017) is one of the lowest in the world, and has been consistently below 2.1 – the level at which a population can replace itself from one generation to the next – for more than three decades (Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2018). In Hong Kong and urban China, women are no longer treated as temporary and marginal members of their natal family (Watson 2004) but are now afforded equivalent access to education and other resources as men (Evans 2008; Judd 1989; Obendiek 2016).

For the middle-class Chinese, an overseas degree is a form of cultural capital that facilitates social reproduction. Educational migration is considered to be a family capital accumulation project, and students themselves are sometimes portrayed as "passive" in the process of migration-decision making (Huang and Yeoh 2011).

However, as Tu (2016) argues, Chinese parents' involvement in their children's educational trajectory cannot be fully explained by traditional Confucian family hierarchy that places parents above their children in all decisions; nor can it be understood with the capital accumulation discourse only. Rather, filial piety is at play, and ensures a life-long reciprocal/hierarchical relationship between parents and children through supporting/receiving overseas education.

In addition, educational credentials have long been used as a measure of compatibility and suitability of a bride and a groom in Chinese societies (Jacka, Kipnis, and Sargeson 2013). Therefore, international education plays an increasingly important role in enhancing marriageability, especially for middle-class women. However, paradoxically, higher education works hand in hand with age hypergamy to determine how and when educational credentials can be used as currency in the marriage market. As I was often told by my informants, a Chinese woman in her mid-twenties equipped with an overseas master's degree is considered to be "intelligent but not over-achieving". On the contrary, a female PhD graduate over the age of 30 is unfavourable because she is seen as "too old", and her educational level "too high" as it may undermine her husband's self-esteem and manhood (see also Fincher 2014; Ji 2015; To 2013). This all suggests the complex relationships between international youth mobility, marriage, marriageability, and gendering of ages that require unpacking. Focusing on migrants' formation of a marriage or romantic relationship during their temporary migration trajectories in the UK, I thus ask in what ways youth mobility and (transnational) marriage are entangled within the gendered life-courses and class trajectories of young Chinese women.

#### TEMPORALITIES OF CLASS IN MIGRATION

Since the 1990s, theories of globalisation and transnationalism have become key frameworks in understanding inequalities in western capitalist societies, and dominated our understanding of international migration (Skeggs 2002; Cappellini, Parsons, and Harman 2016). Some contemporary social theorists argue that Giddens (1994) and Beck's (1994) influential works on reflexive modernity and

individualisation have diverted our research interest away from collective class action and division (see for example Oliver and O'Reilly 2010).

Within the body of migration literature, ethnicity and gender are often seen as sources of difference, usually contributing to the exploitation of immigrants by the majority. Gender is a core lens through which to understand why certain groups, e.g. immigrant women who are ethnic minorities, face a distinct double disadvantage. In comparison to ethnicity and gender, class seemed to have received less attention in social research in the 1990s and 2000s. Wu and Liu (2014, 1392) argue that transnationalism “partially led to the dearth of class analysis” by treating international migrants more or less homogeneously, ignoring the existence of different segments of immigrants and class politics. In addition, migration researchers tended to see class positions as definable places that migrants can effortlessly put themselves in, but the ways in which they move into and out of these places had not been fully explored. Although some scholars have even gone so far as to suggest that class has become less relevant in contemporary society (Pakulski and Waters 1996), more recently, we have seen a resurgence in class studies, with a growing attention paid to the study of class identity in relation to migrant experiences (for example Fathi 2017; Oliver and O'Reilly 2010).

Wright and Shin's (1988) work links temporality to class structure in a way that is useful in understanding class in migration. They argue that class is an embodiment of both the past and possible futures in the present. They state that “processual concepts of class can be viewed as linking class to the past whereas structural concepts link class to the future” (Wright and Shin 1988, 58). In their discussion of the temporality of class analysis in processual approaches, they go on to assert:

Processual views...see classes as constituted by the lived experiences of people. Classes exist only insofar as the biographies of individuals are organised in such a way that they share a set of experiences over time which define their lives in class terms...Processual approaches to class revolve around the problem of learning, with how people come to learn to be class-members with the accompanying identities, worldviews, life-styles, meanings. At any given moment, what we have learned is explained by the trajectory of experiences that have accumulated in our lives...processual approaches, therefore, is primarily backward-looking: class is an embodiment of the past in the present (Wright and Shin 1988, 58).

The temporality of class analysis in structural approaches, as Wright and Shin (1988: 59) further suggest, concerns the future:

Structural approaches to class, in contrast, revolve around the objective choices facing actors. The feasible set of objective alternatives facing actors within a class structure defines a range of possible future states that are available to them. History may matter in so far as it helps to explain why the class structure is the way it is, but it is not conceptually constitutive of the concept of class itself. The temporality of class analysis in structural approaches, therefore, is primarily future-looking: class is an embodiment of possible future in the present.

Migrants' interaction with and integration into the host society forces them to re-evaluate their class position, and in doing so, they must look backward and forward to try to make sense of their current socio-economic position. Temporary migrants, whose intention of permanent settlement into a destination country is unfixed, may evaluate their class positions by comparing themselves with their new social network in the UK and their peers "back home".

This thesis argues that migrants try to make sense of their class positions in the host society by observing what class means and learning how to fit into a new class system in their everyday lives. For example, some migrants only realise the close correlation between British accents and social statuses after they move to the UK; some may attempt to learn and fake an accent so that they would be perceived as more respectable. Migration as a life trajectory is also a trajectory of class experiences, during which migrants' old worldviews are challenged; lifestyles are changed; and meanings associated with privileges are renewed. This accumulation of class experiences and events in an individual biography gradually shapes migrants' class identity in a new country, making class identification a constant work-in-progress. In this thesis, I will explore temporary migrants' narratives of class identity, and ask: In what ways do the temporalities of migration and the temporality of class work simultaneously to shape temporary migrants' class identity?

#### MEANINGS OF SUCCESS AND RESPECTABLE FEMININITY

The topic of "success" was often spontaneously brought up by informants. For student migrants, "success" is defined by the ranking of the school or university that

he or she is admitted to. After graduation, the definition of “success” becomes more ambiguous, and continues to “change over time and in different social spaces” (Tu 2016, 5). Being seen as “successful” is important for both men and women from mainland China and Hong Kong, as it is related to whether one is considered respectable or not. Throughout my research, I found no big difference in the social meanings of being successful between mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese. Take a look at what Kelly from mainland China said,

To be successful is to find a job I like... I just hope to lessen the burden of my parents and my husband. I shouldn't make my parents worried about me all the time, who still support me financially. My living cost is quite high. And I don't want to just take from my parents without giving...I probably wouldn't give my parents money even if I could, but I would send them gifts from UK once my life here is stable...My husband and I will buy a house soon after I submit my essay. We want to buy a house nearby the university, it would be more expensive but I think it's worth it...We want to have kids but we probably won't do it now because I want to find a job first.

Also, here is what Belle from Hong Kong said,

I think that coming to the UK to study is not just about studying but becoming an adult. Now I am no longer the little girl that needs my mum's help. I had never tidied my home when I lived in Hong Kong. I didn't know how to cook. I didn't even know how to cook an instant noodle. But now I am the one who takes care of my husband. I remember I cried in front of my mum one time and I said I am worried that I wouldn't have any big achievement in life. My mum said she gave me so much money to study in the UK, but she never expected me to have high achievement. She just wanted me to graduate successfully and experience life in the UK. She just wanted me to be happy...I think once I find a job and am able to apply for my mum to settle in the UK with me, I could be truly proud of myself...I want to have two children in the future.

For both mainland Chinese and Hong Kong women, securing employment in the UK, becoming financially independent, being able to return parents' investment in their overseas education by showing them that they live a good and happy life, and



fulfilling middle-class aspirations of owning a home and having children are all parts of the common package of success that most mainland Chinese and Hong Kong informants said they hoped to achieve. By achieving this package, young migrants then considered themselves to be successful, thus respectable.

According to Skeggs (1997:3), to be respectable is to be moral, to be worthy of society. For the women in this study, as I will show in chapter 6, respectability is only achieved through the fulfilment of a number of gendered, and at times contradictory, expectations. This relates to the notion of respectable femininity, a topic which social scientists first studied in relation to white, middle-class women in Victorian Britain, and which was associated with domesticity, appropriate behaviour, language (Davidoff and Hall 2013; Skeggs 2002), and sexual conduct (Frances 1994).

According to Skeggs (2002), respectable femininity is constructed around particular types of morals and aesthetics, and is articulated as a process through which women add value to themselves. Respectability is seen to be an object of knowledge, and a symbolic capital that the working-class lacks. Those who are respectable are considered to be capable of being moral, while others are seen to be immoral and in need of control (Strathern 1992). Respectable femininity has since been researched in different cultural and racial contexts, such as East Asia, South Asia, and Africa, where normative perceptions of respectable femininity involve women prioritising family above work through careful management of marriage and child-bearing, taking up caring and socialising roles, and upholding moral propriety (Ang 2016; Hussein 2017; Khumalo, McKay, and Freimund 2015). For example, the popular “leftover women” discourse in China demonstrates how important marriage and child-rearing are in the making of respectable Chinese femininity. But studies concerning middle-class women also point out that the influence of globalisation, and the normalisation of women becoming more educated and economically independent, have constructed new class identities for certain women and changed gender relationships in countries such as Singapore and Bangladesh, making them (re)negotiate respectable femininity and (re)draw class boundaries (for example, see Ang 2016; Hussein 2017).

My empirical concern lies in what it means to be respectable for Chinese women who consider themselves as coming from a middle-class background in their countries of origin. Chinese women in this study suffered from several paradoxes. Most of the young mainland Chinese women were the product of China's compulsory birth control policy. In many cases, they represented the "only hope" for their families to raise successful off-spring (Fong 2011; Goh 2011; Tu 2016). Most of the Hong Kong informants were the first in their families to attend university overseas; they described a high level of parental expectation on them to find decent jobs, build a career, and excel in life. International education is indeed related to the making of middle-classness. Nonetheless, the value of an overseas degree in the Asian job market has decreased in the past decade (Hao and Welch 2012).

Chinese temporary migrants who desire to stay on in the UK tend to narrate a migration story of opportunities and impediments. Although migrants generally perceive an extension of their stay in the UK, particularly through employment, as a form of success, transition into the British visa-sponsored labour market may not be an easy journey. For example, under the points-based immigration system of the UK, workers who have a skilled job offer and a certificate of sponsorship from a UK employer are issued a Tier 2 visa. In 2014, the numbers of Tier 2 work-related visas granted to citizens of China and Hong Kong were just over 5,000 and less than 1,500 respectively (Home Office 2014). These figures seem low, especially considering that over 90,000 mainland Chinese students, and over 16,000 Hong Kong students studied in the UK in 2014 (UK Higher Education Statistics Agency 2018). Young Chinese migrants are aware of the limitations of their various forms of capital, such as economic, cultural and social capital, in facilitating their transnational goals, and the risk of experiencing immediate downward mobility in the UK (for example, see Fong 2011; Ho 2011; 2013). At the same time, migrant women are aware that the parameters of 'success' constantly change, and are mindful of the need to fulfil other life goals such as marriage and family.

I am particularly interested in the experiences of student-turned-spouse migrants and those who remained in or re-migrated to the UK through marriage immigration. These women, as I observe, considered prolonging their stays in the UK through marriage a choice, rather than a necessity. This "choice", however, centres around the paradox of global hypergamy that puts pressure on women to "marry up". I will

discuss how women who desire to become modern, progressive and respectable suffer from paradoxes regarding marriage immigration to the UK. Such marriage is considered, on the one hand, a “shortcut” to success that is below them as well-educated middle-class individuals, and on the other hand, an immigration method that could be undertaken by lower-class migrants who have minimal resources, therefore hindering their respectable femininity – a key marker of middle-classness.

Respectable femininity is taken as a relational concept in this thesis. Ang's (2016) research shows that through criticising Chinese lower-class migrant women's materialism and lack of work or *proper* work, middle-class Chinese-Singaporean women are able to re-establish their own respectable femininity and reinforce the markers of *what should not be* and *who we are not*. Recognising that a woman's respectability is tightly interwoven with her marriage, my aim is thus to understand what it means to be a respectable middle-class Chinese woman in the context of transnational marriage. By pointing out lower-class Chinese married migrants' unrespectable femininity and instrumentality, Chinese migrant women in this study produce and maintain their identity and honour, both personally and collectively.

Respectable femininity is also a contextual concept. Although both the British and Chinese discourses of middle-class femininity position women as overseers of order in the home (Ang 2016), the English and Chinese notions of respectable femininity are also different in many ways. For example, certain behaviours that carry symbolic meanings in the construction of middle-classness in a Chinese context may not have the same value in the British context. Since Chinese student-turned-spouse migrants in the UK are simultaneously embedded in aspects of both the British and the Chinese systems, they need to negotiate respectable femininity, gender expectations and desires in these two worlds. How do migration and transnational marriage shape Chinese women's new understandings of respectability? As Skeggs (2002) argues, judgements of culture are put into effect to produce and maintain class divisions. For the Chinese migrant women in this study, the “judgements of culture(s)” refer to the middle-class culture in China and in the UK; their key task therefore is to legitimise status claims and decide which status claims are respectable in which context. Women's status claims, I will argue, help them to negotiate both the decision to marry, and power within their relationships and marriages.

## METHOD

### DATA COLLECTION AND ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

This thesis stems from a 13-month qualitative study exploring how young, well-educated, middle-class Chinese temporary migrants seek to navigate their migration trajectories, experiences, and future plans in the UK. I used the snowball method of sampling to facilitate in-depth and semi-structured qualitative interviews with Chinese migrants. I conducted one or two follow-up interviews with four of my ten key informants. As for the rest of the key informants, I sent follow-up messages via WeChat or WhatsApp asking about their recent lives a few months after the interview and received their replies. Snowball method of sampling was used because I considered that some informants' romantic relationships may entail a sense of instrumentality, which is potentially a sensitive and controversial issue. It is not easy to locate these migrants in any geographical space and get them to share their stories. I began by asking friends and colleagues, who themselves were temporary migrants to the UK, to recommend interview candidates.

At the very beginning, an informant named Sarah suggested that I could approach more potential interviewees if I went with her to a Chinese church in Scotland. I gladly accepted her invitation, and for the first few months of my fieldwork, I attended Sunday service and Bible studies every Wednesday (and sometimes Thursday) to get to know other church-goers, who were often Chinese students or graduates. Gradually, I was able to interview Biyu, Victoria and Kelly in public places outside of the church, such as coffee shops and restaurants.

Although I initially considered the church as a key field site that allowed me to do participant observation and interview informants, I soon encountered a problem that eventually led to me ceasing participation in the church. At that time, the number of informants that I met outside of the church had gradually increased. Through listening to my audio recordings and preparing transcripts after the interviews, and comparing my fieldnotes, I discovered that the narratives of informants whom I met inside and outside of the church were very different. While the former tended to stress the religious aspect of their lives and the role of God in guiding their decision

to migrate, their relationship, and their marriage in the UK, the latter told stories that had fewer religious elements. This is not to say that informants that I met outside of the church were all atheists. In fact, I interviewed eight self-identified Christian informants whom I met outside of the church. However, even when comparing Christians that I met through the church and outside of the church, the former group still seemed to engage in a stronger Christian narrative. There are two factors that may contribute to this pattern. First of all, I entered the church as a researcher who had grown up in a Christian family and self-identified as a half-believer. Although I considered the interviews part of the data collection process, my informants may have perceived them as opportunities not only to share their life stories, but also to inspire and guide me through their stories and relationships with God. Second, informants may have wished to maintain the self-presentation they performed at church, even during individual interviews. Since religion - or more specifically, Christianity - is not the main focus of my research, I decided to stop recruiting informants from the church in the middle phase of my fieldwork. This allowed me to devote more time and effort to approaching informants through the snowball method of sampling, which proved rewarding.

My goal was to understand migrants' plans, hopes, and ways of staying on in the UK. Initially, the main criterion for inclusion in this study was very broadly-defined: informants should have the intention of prolonging their stay in the UK. Some informants admitted to me that they had no idea whether they could participate in my research because they were not sure about their future plans, and whether they wished to stay living in the UK permanently. This is partly because of the nature of my informants, who were young and highly mobile, and often saw their future as full of possibilities, excitement, and uncertainties. In the end, I had to rework the research design and limited my targeted informants to those who aimed to stay in the UK for longer than they had originally intended before coming to the UK. In this way, student migrants or working holiday makers who wished to return to China or Hong Kong immediately after the expiry of their visas were excluded.

My informants' referrals helped aid the process of earning the trust of other research candidates who agreed to participate. I was then introduced to more potential informants by those candidates who had become informants. However, the process of interviewing through snowball sampling was sometimes not as straightforward as

I had hoped. There are two reasons for this. The first is that targeted informants' intention of staying on in the UK was subject to change. My informants selectively introduced me to their friends who they believed hoped to stay on in the UK. It was only after I started texting or talking to some of these potential informants, that I learned that they did not actually have plans to stay. In one case, my informant Jie Zhen admitted to me that she would not have been able to take part in this project if I had asked her to participate two months before our interview date because her plans had just changed.

The second reason for the challenges in recruiting informants has to do with the heated British socio-political atmosphere concerning immigration throughout my fieldwork. In 2016, then Prime Minister David Cameron re-stated the Conservatives Party's aim to reduce the net migration figure to below 100,000, which was a target first proposed in 2010. With mainstream newspapers continually publishing stories that cast migrants and refugees in a negative light (White 2015), and public debate around the issue of freedom of movement within the EU, the UK European Union membership referendum was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016, soon after I started the initial stage of fieldwork in April. When the referendum result was announced with a majority of British voters supporting leaving the EU (51.9%), it was clear to me and my informants that the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, otherwise informally known as "Brexit", would come in due course. Little did we know that three years after the referendum and at the moment of writing, there is still no clarity about how the UK plans to withdraw from the EU. Nevertheless, in these years of research and writing, I have noticed that the government has increasingly geared policies towards reducing the number of immigrants, including asylum seekers, refugees, non-citizens and non-EEA migrants, in the UK. The scandal regarding the Windrush-era immigrants in 2018 is one example<sup>4</sup> of the impact of the Home Office's targets for removal of so-called illegal immigrants (Khomami and Naujokaityte 2018). The conflicts between states' desire to ensure that the majority of migrants only stay in

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<sup>4</sup> The Windrush scandal started when the Home Office removed a number of Windrush-era immigrants who had mostly been born as British subjects and moved to the UK from the West Indies half a century ago, and did not have documentation to prove their British nationality. The former Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, apologised for the "appalling" treatment of Windrush citizens (Gentleman 2018) and consequently had to resign.

the UK temporarily, and migrants' own aspirations and agency to challenge the state-defined boundaries of temporariness and permanence, have always existed. However, the recent political environment concerning immigration and Brexit may have intensified such conflicts, and changed some migrants' lives and future plans. This vastly shapes migrants' experiences of belonging and intimacy in the UK.

Although it is not my central aim to study the impacts of Brexit on Chinese temporary migrants in the UK, the political context that I have laid out here is important due to the fact that this research was conducted from March 2016 to April 2017, a period which overlapped with the pre- (and post-) referendum. The political climate at the time was a source of concern for many of the Chinese migrants that I talked to. To a certain extent, the result of the EU referendum affected who I could approach for interviews, and how informants perceived their futures in the UK. Since my fieldwork relied mainly on snowball sampling, some potential informants declined my invitations for interviews. This included potential informants who no longer planned to stay on after the referendum. In general, those who agreed to be interviewed, at the time of interviews, remained hopeful to stay on despite the unclear situation of Brexit and their temporary residency statuses in the UK.

## INTERVIEWS

Interviews were conducted in London and Edinburgh, which were among the five most populous cities for Chinese migrants in the UK in 2015 (Unterreiner 2015). I arranged interviews in coffee shops, cafés and restaurants. In some cases where it was not practical to meet in person due to travel arrangements, interviews were conducted using the video chat functions of Skype, WhatsApp and WeChat. With informants' permission, interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin or Cantonese, and mostly lasted between one and three hours. The longest interview I conducted lasted 6 hours. Long, in-depth and semi-structured interviews allowed me to engage in deep conversation with informants. Some informants admitted that they had willingly participated in the interview because our lives did not overlap. Many regarded the interview as a good opportunity to reflect on their lives and migration trajectories.

## ETHICS CONCERNS

I followed the guidelines and research ethics framework provided by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Social and Political Science, the University of Edinburgh, and underwent the ethical review process before embarking for my fieldwork, which ensured that my research would not directly or indirectly harm either myself or the participants in our physical, psychological and social integrity. Particular attention was paid to the sensitivity of the topic of instrumental relationships being investigated. I was concerned about the possibility that some Chinese migrants may form a relationship for instrumental reasons in order to obtain residency rights in the UK. I considered that exposing these informants' identities would put them at risk, especially if authorities such as Home Office were concerned, as this could invalidate their visa or residency status. Therefore, I provided informants with an option to not audio-record interviews. I assured them they needed not answer questions if they did not want to and that they had the right to terminate participation in the research at any time. I anonymised any such resultant data in this thesis (and in my publications) by using pseudonyms, altering details that might identify informants and creating compound/multiple characters. In spite of the fact that the vast majority of my informants did not claim that they looked for romantic relationships in the UK for visa purposes, my research topic could still be seen as sensitive; for this reason, I have been careful to ensure anonymity and present the overall picture of my research in a sensitive way.

I obtained voluntary and informed consent before interviewing. I considered voluntary and informed consent process as dynamic, continuous and reflexive. Informed consent is obtained through a relationship of trust, which does not necessarily require a particular written or signed form. As written informed consent entails a sense of formality, I considered it is the quality of the consent, not its format, which is relevant. I believe a relationship of trust cannot be built through signing a written consent form; rather it is developed through building a personal connection with informants by engaging in informal chat and casual messages prior to interview, and my own presentation and delivery during interviews.



The audio recordings are now retained for my own future research. They are kept in my personal laptop with password to keep them safe, with USB backup stored in a safe place at home. I chose not to upload the recordings to an online platform such as iCloud, because I consider the associated privacy risks too high.

## DATA ANALYSIS

I followed an interview guide to organise each interview. Interviews usually began with a list of questions and topics that needed to be covered (Bernard 2011), such as informants' motivations for migration, socio-economic background, employment status, social life, and romantic experiences and views (see appendix). I modified my follow-up questions based on each informant's story. For example, I was told by my first few informants that they found it difficult to maintain a relationship when time on a visa was running out. I then added questions related to this issue. Time and temporality became an important theme to understand migrants' intimate lives, life-course decisions, and future planning while conducting data analysis.

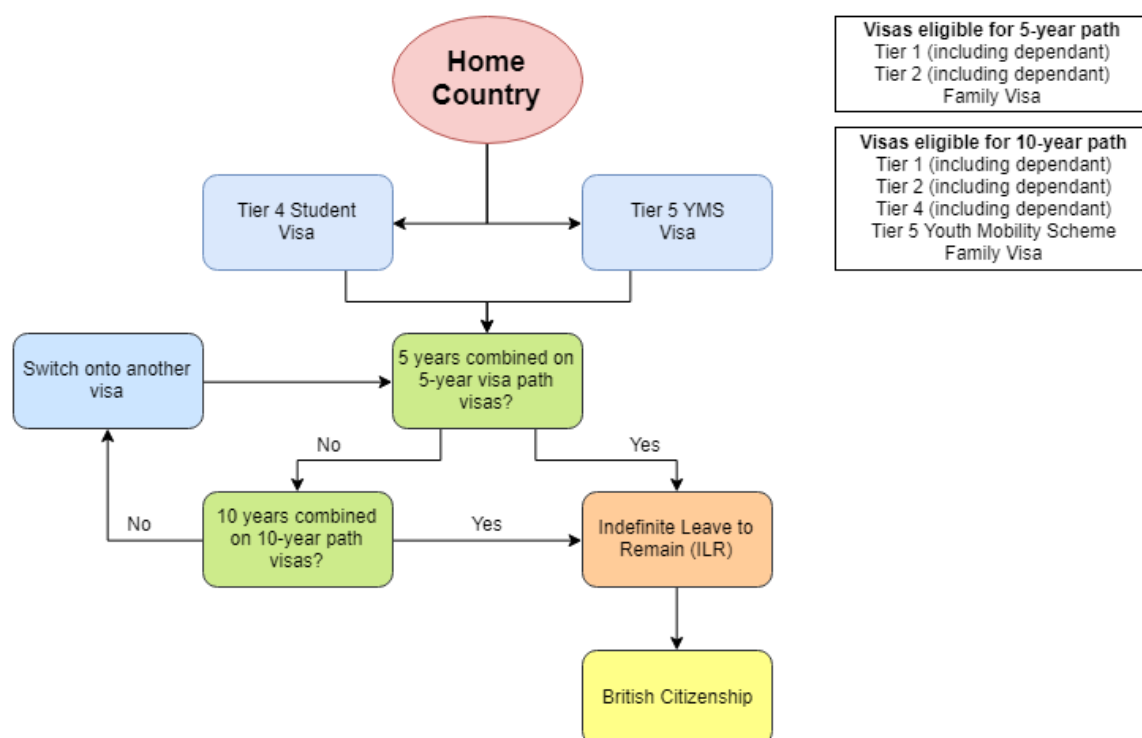
I translated and transcribed all interviews into English. Using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 2017), I gradually developed coding categories and major themes. This approach allowed research topics to develop "organically"; as I collected more data, I probed different points of interest at different stages of the research (Charmaz 2014). I allowed new themes to emerge and importantly, reconceptualised my study accordingly. I used NVivo 11, a software application for social research, to organise and analyse my data. Whilst analysing the data, I read the interview transcripts multiple times and coded a series of strong themes pertaining to "visa-time restriction", "relationship difficulties", "employment difficulties" and "marriage pressure", which are discussed in this thesis. In the coding process, I developed new concepts and revisited my transcripts from time to time to combine and divide certain codes. In this ongoing process of reconceptualising themes, I also (re)consulted literature to (re)frame my study.

## SAMPLES

I interviewed a total of 67 Chinese temporary migrants, ranging from 22 to 36 years of age, including 51 female informants and 16 male informants. In this thesis, due to the predominant focus on female informants, male informants' data is mainly used as providing comparison and showing contrasting gendered experiences. Through snowball sampling, I was able to interview various types of visa holders and their dependants, including: Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur); Tier 1 (Entrepreneur); Tier 2 (General); Tier 2 (Intra-company transfer); Tier 4 (student); Tier 5 (Youth Mobility Scheme); family permit (or spouse visa); and EEA family permit.

At present, it is only through living in the UK for a certain period of time, usually either on the 5-year or 10-year path, that a temporary migrant is eligible to apply for indefinite leave to remain – permanent residency status akin to probationary citizenship. For those who obtain permanent residency in the UK, it will take another year to become eligible to apply for British citizenship. Figure 4 below shows the typical immigration paths that Chinese temporary migrants in this study took, which are available at the time of writing (November 2019). Most entered the UK as a student or working holiday maker, then went through a range of immigration processes to prolong their stays in the UK.

**Figure 4 Typical immigration paths of Chinese temporary migrants**



The above figure outlines the two immigration paths of Chinese temporary migrants, who typically entered the UK as either an international student or a working holiday maker. If they wish to continue to stay in the UK after their initial visa expires, they have to first consider which visas they are able to switch onto, and the implication of their choices. Apart from becoming a Tier 2 skilled worker or a Tier 1 entrepreneur themselves, Chinese temporary migrants can also stay on in the UK through marriage, i.e. by obtaining a dependent visa or a family visa. While a dependent visa is given to the spouse or partner of an eligible British temporary visa holder, such as a Tier 2 skilled worker or a Tier 1 entrepreneur, a family visa is granted to the spouse or partner of an eligible British citizen/permanent resident/EEA national. Regardless of which visa(s) a Chinese temporary migrant switches onto during his/her 5-year or 10-year time in the UK, he/she must fulfil the requirements of either the 5-year or 10-year immigration path in order to obtain Indefinite Leave to Remain.

Circular migration was common among my informants. More than four fifths (or 80%) of the 67 informants were not first-time visa holders in the UK. The majority

had switched visa at least once since they first arrived the UK. Table 1 below shows the number of times my informants switched visas.

**Table 1 The number of times informants switched visas**

<b>Number of times visa switched</b>	<b>Number of Informants</b>
Not applicable	13
Once	22
Twice	24
Thrice	8

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMALE INFORMANTS

All of my 51 female informants were heterosexual, and nearly half (21 out of 51) were married. The views of others, including those currently dating or involved in long-term relationships, and those not in relationships, on topics such as romance and marriage, were also considered. Twenty informants were in a relationship or marriage with a British permanent resident or citizen; two had an EU partner; and 15 had a partner who was a UK temporary visa holder.

The informants were well-educated; all but one held at least an undergraduate degree, with the majority having obtained a master's degree. One-third of the women were not in employment or held no income at the time of interview. I classed another one-third of the women as low-income, earning a net monthly salary of less than £1,000. These informants relied heavily on the resources provided by their families in China or Hong Kong and/or their partners in the UK in order to support their overseas living expenses. Only around one-fifth of my informants earned an income that they felt allowed them to live comfortably. These informants were from professions such as accounting, banking, and academia. More details on the female informant characteristics are listed in Table 2.

**Table 2 Characteristics of female informants (N=51)**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>n</b>
<b>Relationship status</b>	
Married	21
In a relationship	11
Engaged	3
Divorced	2
Single	14
<b>Education</b>	
Higher diploma	1
Bachelor's degree	14
Master's degree	34
Doctoral degree	2
<b>Income</b>	
No income (not employed) <sup>5</sup>	17
Net monthly salary of less than £1,000	16
Net monthly salary of between £1,000 – £1,999	7
Net monthly salary of between £2,000 – £2,999	9
Net monthly salary of over £3,000	2

Figure 5 below shows the visas held at the time of the research interview by the 42 mainland Chinese and Hong Kong informants who first came to the UK as students.

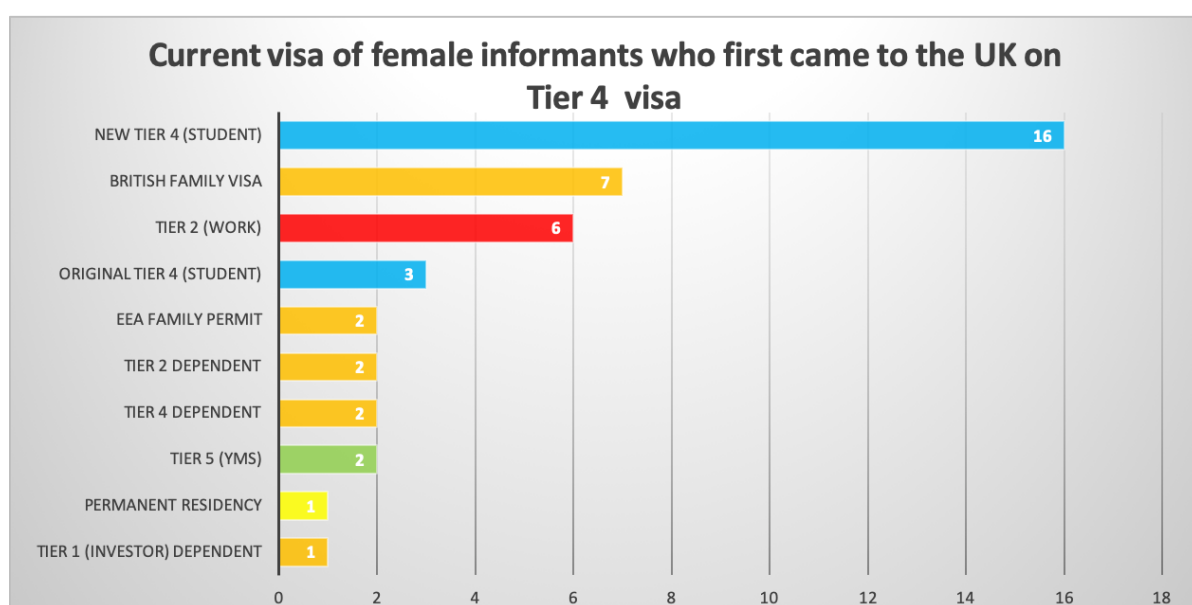
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<sup>5</sup> This includes students who were being supported by their parents.

Apart from a large group who were furthering their studies on student visas (N=16), most informants prolonged their stays in the UK by switching to a dependant visa or an EU family permit (N=14). This method of staying on was much more prevalent than using the visa-sponsored employment route (N=6).

The orange colour in the table refers to the family/dependent path undertaken by informants. The blue colour refers to the study route. The red colour means the visa-sponsored employment path.

**Figure 5 The visas that my female informants held**



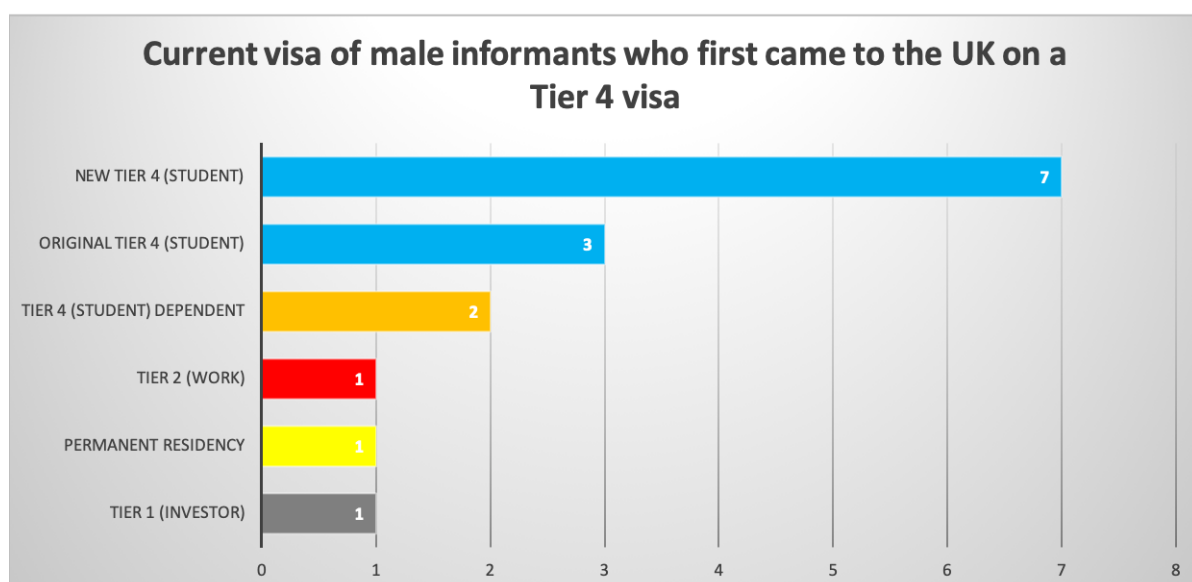
Note: In figure 5, “original Tier 4 (student) visa holders” refers to those who held their first Tier 4 visa. Students who held a new Tier 4 visa were those who chose to continue studying in the UK after receiving an initial Tier 4 visa and completing a level of education qualification. According to Home Office, students who enrol in a new programme after finishing their course must obtain a new Tier 4 visa sponsored by a UK university.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF MALE INFORMANTS

The majority of the 16 male informants were heterosexual; two self-identified as bisexual, and one was homosexual. At the time of interview, five were married; five were single; and six were in a relationship. Just like the women, the men in this

study were well-educated; all but one held at least an undergraduate-level education, with the majority having obtained at least a master's degree. Four of the men had obtained a doctoral degree. One-third (6) of the men were not in employment or held no income at the time of interview. I also classed four men as low-income, earning a net monthly salary of less than £1,000. Three informants earned a net monthly salary of between £1,000 and £1,999; one informant earned between £2,000 and £2,999 a month, and two earned over £3,000. Most of these informants had recently graduated and were doing temporary or part-time work in the UK. Figure 6 shows the visas held at time of interview by the 15 male informants who first came to the UK as students. Most of the men prolonged their stays in the UK through furthering their studies. Apart from one informant who obtained permanent residency through employment, only two men stayed on through becoming an entrepreneur or a skilled worker. In general, male informants tended not to remain in the UK through marriage or partnership, and expressed their wish not to do so. Although in reality, only a handful of men in my sample were able to switch onto a migration path that would lead to permanent residence, most student migrants who chose to further their study aspired to become a skilled migrant and believed that acquiring a higher level of education would help them to achieve that goal one day.

**Figure 6 The visas that my male informants held**



My positionality and experiences shape how I approached this research and my informants. As a temporary migrant who first came to the UK as a working holiday maker with a Tier 5 (YMS) visa, I failed to secure visa-sponsored employment despite my master's degree in Social Science, obtained in Hong Kong. When the expiry date of my visa was approaching, I faced the dilemma of either returning to Hong Kong, or getting married in my mid-twenties in order to stay living in the country with my partner; a step which at the time we were reluctant to take. In the end, I was fortunate enough to receive financial support from the joint funds of two families to further my study, which also allowed me to stay living in the UK with my partner without marrying.

My gendered and classed positionalities, personal experiences and struggles facilitated my connection with the women in this study, and gave me insights that may not be available to others. Simultaneously, I am aware of the danger of having my "objectivity" jeopardised due to some of the similarities between myself, and my research subjects', experiences. Here, I follow Mason's (2002) reflexive approach, which sees a researcher's biography and personal characteristics as inseparable from the research context, data collection, and interpretation processes (see also Maynard and Purvis 1994; Stanley and Wise 1993). Furthermore, to minimise the impact of my "authority" as a researcher and make my informants feel as comfortable as possible during interviews, I gave them the opportunity to choose both the interview location and the language spoken during the interview.

Finally, this research is not without limitations. As previously mentioned, my data on men and women shows that migration motivations, opportunities, and constraints are highly gendered. In this thesis, I mainly focus on Chinese migrant women's perspectives, which may make discussions on men less substantial. Additionally, although romance and marriage are key themes in this research, I did not interview my female informants' partners in the UK. As a result, I had no direct means with which to either understand their perspectives or validate/challenge my informants' narratives. Nonetheless, these migrant women's stories are relevant to the purpose of this thesis, which is to study the agency, opportunities, and constraints



experienced by temporary migrants in achieving their life goals, and the impacts of time, temporality, and states' practices on migrants' lives and trajectories, in particular their life-course decisions and the timing of their life-course events.

Due to the nature of qualitative research, it is not possible to generalise the findings to the population of Chinese temporary migrants in the UK as a whole. However, this research gives valuable insights into the life struggles, and the dynamics of relationships and marriage negotiations of not only Chinese migrants but migrants in general. This study offers an initial understanding and sound base for further research in migration studies, including quantitative research to test the findings suggested.

#### LIST OF KEY INDIVIDUALS

Below is a list of key individuals who appear in this thesis. The individuals on this list are essential not only because they were key informants, with whom I either conducted one to two follow-up interviews or kept in touch on social media even after the initial interview, but also because in many ways their experiences shaped the direction of this research. Quotes from other individuals, who were less prominent in the research and are therefore not included on the list, will also be presented in various chapters, when a particular argument or point is being made. It is important to note that in this thesis, I describe my informants' partners as 'British' or 'English' or 'Scottish' based on how migrants described them, their place of residence or accent.

#### WOMEN

##### **Vivian**

As a Hong Kong Chinese woman, Vivian came to the UK as a Tier 5 (Youth Mobility Scheme) visa holder in 2015, when she was in her late twenties. Approaching the age of 30, she felt that she wanted to secure a life-long partner and escape from the social stigma of her singlehood in the UK. She met John, a 35-year-old British citizen from Hong Kong, one year after she moved to the UK.

### **Lin Lin**

Lin Lin was a young mainland Chinese woman in her mid-twenties who studied for two master's degrees in the UK. She held a Tier-4 student dependant visa when we met. She was married to a mainland Chinese student migrant who lived in the UK at the time.

### **Qing**

At the age of 25, Qing had already been married to a British citizen of Hong Kong origin for two years. Qing was a mainland Chinese who first came to the UK for studying in 2009. After marrying, she moved into her husband's premarital home bought by her husband's parents, but she did not feel entitled to the home that she lived in because her name was not on the deed and her father-in-law often brought relatives and friends to stay in their house as if he saw himself as the "true owner" of the place (see chapter 6 for detail).

### **Cher**

Cher was a 27-year-old Hong Kong Chinese migrant who got married with a Tier 2 work visa holder of East Asian origin in 2016. This marriage changed her original plan to return to Hong Kong for settlement. Just as Cher thought that she and her husband would now live in the UK for a long time and eventually obtain permanent residency, her husband became unsure about living in the UK and wanted to return to his country of origin.

### **Ying**

Ying was a 27-year-old PhD student from mainland China who got married to her Chinese partner of three years in order to bring him with her to the UK. Their marriage broke down three months after they left China. Ying was in a new relationship when I last spoke to her.

### **Belle**

Belle was a 24-year-old undergraduate student from Hong Kong who was married to Chris, an English PhD student in the UK. The couple had always lived apart, even

after their marriage, because Chris was away for an internship in an EU country. Belle considered Chris would be the breadwinner for their family in the future.

### **Karmen**

Karmen was a former nurse in her early thirties from Hong Kong. She rated job and romance as the top two reasons for moving to the UK. Karmen had dated a few Hong Kong men before but was not in a long-term relationship. She hoped to find a partner in the UK.

## MEN

### **Ronald**

Ronald was a 24-year-old Hong Kong student migrant, who after completing his first degree, decided to stay on through studying a second degree in nursing. Identified himself as a bisexual, Ronald had thought about obtaining British permanent residency through his relationship with an EU national, but in the end, he chose to pursue a career path that would lead to permanent settlement.

### **Yi Fung**

Having previously studied in the UK, at the age of 28, Yi Fung returned to the UK from mainland China with his wife, who received a postgraduate degree offer. As the couple's time in the UK was running out, Yi Fung was very frustrated and stressed, especially because his wife was diagnosed with moderate depression and was unable to finish her study in time.

### **Leon**

Leon, a 29-year-old Hong Kong Chinese migrant became a PhD graduate in Materials Science in 2016. At the time of the interview, he was searching for visa-sponsored jobs in the UK while at the same time having a temporary job at a community centre. Six months later, Leon told me that he was still in the same job and was no longer limiting himself to job opportunities in the UK.

## STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

**Chapter 1 On the Move for Hope, Love and Success”** explores Chinese migrants’ socio-economic, political and romantic motivations for moving to the UK temporarily, and their aspirations to move over their life-courses through migration. It discusses how temporary migration to the UK is a decision shaped by parental influence, and is related to young Chinese migrants’ class trajectories.

**Chapter 2 Navigating Class: The Pig’s Liver and the Lobster** argues that class as a concept in migration studies has not been fully examined. Regarding themselves as coming from a middle-class background in China or Hong Kong, Chinese temporary migrants in the UK hope to accumulate different types of capital and be recognised as middle class in the new cultural and socio-economic environment. The chapter begins by exploring the social meanings of being middle class in three geographical contexts, i.e. mainland China, Hong Kong and the UK. It shows how migration forces migrants to reflect on their class identity and challenges their old understandings about class. This chapter also argues that temporary migrants’ socio-economic mobility and class-related privileges are often temporarily suspended due to their lack of permanent residency status and their differential inclusion in the British labour market. It examines how the temporalities of migration and the temporality of class work together to shape migrants’ class experiences.

**Chapter 3 Obstacles to Capital Accumulation and Conversion: Differential Inclusion in the Labour Market** looks at the various forms of capital that migrants obtain, such as economic, cultural and social capital, and the usefulness and limitations of these forms of capital in facilitating migrants to achieve their transnational goals, including having better life chances and longer duration of residence in the UK. This chapter contributes to class and capital discussion by examining the processes of capital conversion and proposing three subtypes of capital, i.e. temporal capital, family capital and intimate relationship capital, that I argue are particularly important for temporary migrants who have yet to settle in the UK successfully.

**Chapter 4 Navigating Romance, Relationships and Marriage** looks at how Chinese temporary migrants consider romance an important experience in their

migration trajectories, and how they seek romantic opportunities through the use of social media and social networks. It demonstrates how discourses of love and sexual capital, such as virginity, are used by migrants to negotiate power in their relationships.

### **Chapter 5 “The Clock is Ticking”: Time and Temporalities of Transnational**

**Marriages and Migrant Lives** scrutinises the ways in which migrant women navigate their intimate lives under the constraints of existing migration infrastructures. It argues that visa-time constraints, the social expectation of marrying, and the gendering of age shape women’s timing and decisions related to marriage and transnational family formation. It explores how migrant women’s state of temporariness forces marriage negotiations with their partner in the UK to be conducted under a time-constrained situation. Moreover, it conceptualises migrant women’s marriages which are based on young relationships formed before or soon after the expiration of visas as “lightning marriages”. The chapter demonstrates how these marriages are subjected to socio-cultural and state-subscribed stereotypes and suspicions, and how migrant women counteract these by making use of the discourse of love to justify their marriage choices.

**Chapter 6 Becoming Respectable** concerns how transnational marriages may challenge the normal principle of marriage formation in Chinese societies - a compatible family or class background between a bride and a groom - and how migrants negotiate their marriage choices. It examines Chinese migrant women’s marriages to two types of men: (1) a British partner with a Chinese background (for example, a British-born Chinese, or a British citizen from China or Hong Kong); and (2) a non-Chinese partner in the UK. It argues that middle-class Chinese migrant women suffer from multiple paradoxes, and are torn between contradictory aspirations to become an independent successful woman, and to be seen as a woman who has accomplished marital mobility. Through the notions of choice and sacrifice, the chapter shows how women negotiate power within their transnational relationship or marriage by making it look “equal”.

The **Conclusion** brings together the themes of the thesis through a brief review of some of the main individuals’ journeys after staying in the UK for a period of time. The circumstances of young middle-class Chinese migrants in the UK are vastly

different from the Chinese pioneers, early settlers and the Hong Kong elites who emigrated to western countries in the 1990s in the pursuit of flexible citizenship (Ong 1999). Since migrants' stories in this thesis reveal how temporary migration to the West, like the UK, have become an increasingly important and common resource for middle-class Chinese, not only for the children who go abroad, but also for their family who support them, this research contributes to studies of social changes in China today, and to Chinese transnational migration literature in general. This thesis addresses the need to link temporality to class analysis in migration studies. Through studying temporary migrants' aspirations and experiences in romance, relationships and marriage, this thesis contributes to discussions of the temporariness of contemporary migration, migrant agency, class and respectability.

## CHAPTER 1

### ON THE MOVE FOR HOPE, LOVE AND SUCCESS

It was a sunny day in the autumn of 2016 when I first met Yi Fung, a 28-year-old migrant from mainland China, at the café of my local library. This interview location was suggested by Yi Fung, a master's degree holder, who told me that he came to the library every Wednesday evening for free English lessons. I was surprised because I imagined the English training provided at public library would be beneath the language skill level that Yi Fung had already acquired. "These lessons don't really have a standard format, but they give us a chance to speak English. I am the only Chinese person in the group...it is good, at least now I have an excuse to leave the house," he said. Yi Fung came to the UK in 2011 to pursue a master's degree. He then met his wife who was also a postgraduate student from China studying at the same university. After graduating in 2013, they both returned to China and got married, hoping to convert their overseas credentials into earning capital and becoming *hai gui* – literally, "sea turtles" – a term that is used to refer to overseas returnees. Recently, when the term *hai gui* is used in a context of comparison with another term *hai dai*, directly translated as "seaweed", the former has a connotation of success, while the latter is associated with failure (see Hu and Cairns 2017; Hao and Welsh 2014). For three years, Yi Fung worked as a civil servant, whilst his wife had three different jobs in the media industry in Shanghai. Unsatisfied with her career progress, Yi Fung's wife considered herself a *hai dai*, which refers to returnees who fail to achieve career success, hoped to return to the UK to study for a research master's degree and ultimately pursue a PhD later. At the time, Yi Fung was also unhappy with his job, and considered it "dull" with a "lack of opportunity for promotion". He then decided to follow his wife and return to the UK to seek job opportunities.

Yi Fung and his wife are not alone; their circulatory migration experience was shared by other migrants in this study. The Chinese state-sponsored discourse of transnational migration is highly success-oriented (Nyíri 2002), and centres on migrants' economic and social advancement. This chapter explores young Chinese

migrants' socio-economic, political, and romantic motivations for moving to the UK temporarily. This chapter also discusses the significant role of migrants' parents in shaping their migration decision and migration trajectories.

Both mainland Chinese and Hong Kong migrants in this study have enjoyed an abundance of resources from a young age; they shoulder the hope of their parents to excel in life, and to "realise the unfilled dreams of their parents" (Yan 2006, 256). Mainland Chinese informants in this study were born under the "one-child" policy and to middle-class parents who benefited from the economic reforms that began in the 1970s. They were able to enjoy resources, material commodities and overseas educational opportunities that were inaccessible to their parents' generation (see also Fong 2011), which, in the words of one of my informants, "experienced bitterness when they were young".

Following a different path of socio-economic development, Hong Kong had already adopted a capitalist market economy when it was governed by the British state. Hong Kong informants in this study were born between the 1980s and early 1990s, and were children of the first generation of Hong Kong's middle class. In spite of lacking university education, their parents mostly benefited from the emergence of Hong Kong as a regional financial centre and an increase in new employment positions, which boosted upward social mobility since the mid-1980s (Lui 2014a). A smaller nuclear family structure has also been observed in Hong Kong since the 1980s, whereby Hong Kong families prioritise quality (with heavy emphasis on children's education) over quantity of children (Chow and Lum 2008; Koo and Wong 2009).

## MIGRATION DECISIONS AND PARENTAL INFLUENCE

When asked about their decision to move to the UK, many expressed that their parents played an important role in shaping how, when, and where they should go for study or a working holiday. This research finding is consistent with other studies on Chinese student migrants, which suggest the vital role of Chinese parents in influencing their children's migration decision (Qi 2017; Li et al. 2019). For example, although Alice, who was 27 years old at the time of interview, did not initially want to



study for a PhD because of the many years of commitment it required, she was persuaded by her father in the end. In another example, Cher, a Hong Kong informant in her late twenties, came to the UK at the age of 14 at her father's request. She said,

I didn't want to come the UK at first. It was my father's idea. He initially wanted to send my elder brother to the UK instead of me. My elder brother's academic results were always better than mine, but he was kind of lazy and didn't like studying. My father wanted to have at least one child graduate from a foreign university. At that time, my brother had a girlfriend in Hong Kong, so he really didn't want to go. As a result, I was the substitute in this situation...When I left for the UK in 2005, my father did not want me to study in a mixed-gender school. He chose a boarding school for girls only that is located in a rural area in North Wales as he thought I would have less temptation and wouldn't mess around with boys. He was right. There was nothing at all, just sheep. Even when you go to the town, the town is full of retired people. There was nothing to do. My dad didn't need to worry that I would become a bad girl.

Even at a young age, Cher knew that her father's plan for her was highly gendered. Patriarchal values and norms in Hong Kong place women's sexuality under greater social scrutiny than men's. While pre-marital sexual behaviour is generally acceptable for young men, it is often restricted and repressed for women (Yu 2013). Since, under the patriarchal view, the young female body is considered to be vulnerable, it should be protected and safeguarded by male family members, usually the father. From Cher's perspective, her migration trajectory began with a wish to satisfy her father's aspiration to send at least one child abroad whilst ensuring his daughter stayed away from romance and sex when she was on her own in the UK.

In a separate example, Ling Ling also studied for a master's degree in education in the UK, following her father's advice. She said,

My dad really wanted me to study education. He had a plan for me. He always thinks girls don't need to study for a degree in business. He thinks businesswomen have a very tough life. But teaching is good. In his plan, I would return to China to become a lecturer in a university. It doesn't matter to him whether it would be a good university or not because either way I would have two long holidays each year – summer holiday and winter holiday. In my father's eyes, this means a comfortable life. Of course, I wouldn't earn a lot, but my social status would be high.

Ling Ling did not challenge her father's suggestion; rather she appreciated it and regarded it as an expression of her parents' wish to pave the way for a smooth and

successful life trajectory for her. As Tu (2018) argues, Chinese middle-class parents play a great role in making decisions around educational trajectories. In another example, Weiyi, a 21-year-old mainland Chinese migrant who was also a Canadian citizen, was encouraged by her parents to move to the UK. She explained to me that her parents' "businessmen attitude" was the main reason that she was sent to the UK to live on her own for four years. Weiyi's parents saw life experience outside of Canada as a capital that their daughter should accumulate when she was young, which would be beneficial for her when she returned to Canada or China to work in the future. For many young migrants, like Cher, Ling Ling and Weiyi, their parents did not only decide their migration destination, but also the university degree that they should pursue, and the possible career paths after acquiring academic credentials. Many parents also considered their children's migration destination based on their overseas family network. For instance, Winnie, a Hong Kong working holiday maker in her early twenties, was sent to the UK by her mother and elder sister, who even filled in the application form for her. She said, "My family considered a lot for me. My mum asked my sister's in-laws to let me stay in their house in London, so I could settle here easily. They even found me a job at a Chinese restaurant through our relatives before I even arrived."

In Hong Kong, due to economic restructuring, the perceived value of a local university degree has decreased since the 1990s, but the competition to get into the top universities is still intense. Waters (2006, 182) argues that Hong Kong middle-class families are able to escape from state education through emigration, which allows them to access greater educational opportunities "whilst at the same time changing the mechanisms of exclusion and selection within particular desirable occupations in favour of 'overseas' academic credentials" (see also Balaz and Williams 2004).

For middle-class students who anticipate the prospect of failure in the highly competitive local school system, overseas education provides an escape route to avoid taking the most crucial public examinations<sup>6</sup>. The most significant education

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<sup>6</sup> Before 2011, the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) were standardised examinations for Hong Kong students. After five years of secondary education, most local students were required to take the HKCEE. After sitting the HKCEE and having their examination results announced, candidates could apply for a place in sixth form in local schools. Failure in this exam was

reform in recent history in Hong Kong was the cancellation of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) after a 3-year transitional period, and the introduction of Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) to replace the old systems in 2012. My informants who were affected by the new examination system and the transitional phrase considered themselves as “guinea pigs” and preferred to leave Hong Kong and study abroad. There were also some informants, such as Leon and Ronald, who only decided to leave Hong Kong after knowing that their examination results were not good enough to secure admission to any local universities. Regardless of which examination system that my Hong Kong informants were subjected to, they perceived that the move to the UK would guarantee academic success. After accepting that his son was not willing to leave Hong Kong, Cher’s father changed his mind and considered it would be good for Cher to avoid the intense local academic competition by studying in the UK. She said,

My dad always worried that I wouldn’t be able to get into any university in Hong Kong because I was too lazy. He always thought that I was not as bright as my elder brother so it would be kind of risky to let me even try to take the public exam.

Another common phenomenon that I observed among some of my Hong Kong informants with siblings is that they were “force[d] to relocate as a consequence of a sibling’s anticipated failure” in the competitive school system in Hong Kong (Waters 2006, 184). For instance, Jessica arrived in the UK when she was 16 years old. She said,

In fact, my younger sister came to UK first. She was among the first group of students who had to take the HKDSE. She didn’t want to take the exam and wanted to come to the UK to study A-levels, so I followed my sister to come to the UK to take care of her.

As for the mainland Chinese informants, they shared similar experiences with their Hong Kong counterparts. Many migrated in order to prevent anticipated failure in the

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widely assumed to be the end of a student’s academic career. Those who could remain in the school system were qualified to take the HKALE. Based on the results of the HKCEE and the HKALE, students could apply for admission into tertiary programmes at universities in Hong Kong. In 2012, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) replaced the two standardised exams and became the only public exam for secondary school students.

National Higher Education Entrance Examination, commonly known as *Gaokao*, which is usually taken by students in their last year of senior high school to compete for a space in university. *Gaokao* has been the dominant means of admitting students in Chinese Higher Education Institutions since 1977 (Gu and Magaziner 2016). It is a highly competitive national examination that is tied to the *hukou* system. Although most students aspire to get into prestigious universities in Beijing and Shanghai, such as Peking University and Tsinghua University, they are also aware that elite universities allocate more places for local *hukou* holders in, for example, Beijing and Shanghai. This means that students whose *hukou* is based in cities or provinces outside of Beijing and Shanghai would have to score extremely high marks to get admitted. It is well-known that Chinese students are often under tremendous pressure during the years that they spend preparing for the exam. Thus, overseas education is seen as an easy alternative for middle-class families to achieve the reproduction of social advantage.

While most informants came to the UK directly from either mainland China or Hong Kong, and their educational trajectories involved only one destination country, a small number of informants' journeys involved more than one country and started at a younger age. For example, Li Ming and Qiana both studied in Singapore before coming to the UK. Li Ming moved to Singapore at the age of 15 and completed her high school there. Later on, she chose to study in the UK for her first degree because both Singapore and the UK adopted the British education system, which according to her, meant an easy transition. Qiana finished both her secondary and tertiary education in Singapore and received a small scholarship from the British Council to undertake a postgraduate degree in the UK.

For some migrants, their move to the UK came with a secret agenda to escape from parental care and control. For instance, Mi, a 26-year-old student-turned-spouse migrant initially chose to study in the UK because of a lack of family connections here. She said, "my relatives said to me if I study in Australia or USA, they would have someone to look after me. But I didn't want to live under the eyes of my relatives, so I came to the UK." In addition, as an exceptional case, Ronald claimed that he cunningly planned for his escape from Hong Kong and parental control by purposely performing badly in academic exams. He said,

I was very calculative. When I realised that my parents could actually afford sending me abroad, I used all the methods that I could think of to make sure I could not continue my study in Hong Kong. I knew that I had the ability to get into at least one university programme in Hong Kong, but I was just desperate to leave.

## CHINESE MIGRANTS' TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL IMAGINARIES

Many informants expected material and cultural returns from “world-class” education including securing jobs (Ramirez 2013), building social networks (Collins 2013; Brooks, Fuller, and Waters 2012), and having better marriage choices in the future. International education is also perceived to help students to gain new perspectives and lived cultural experiences (Marginson 2014; Tran 2015), and to become cosmopolitan and global subjects (Kim 2011). The student migrants that I interviewed often regarded the US and the UK as the best destinations for overseas studies. Many said they had compared the UK and the US in terms of education systems and admission requirements. For instance, prospective PhD students and postgraduates normally considered it would take a shorter time to complete a PhD in the UK (usually within four years), than in the US (usually within four to eight years). At the same time, informants perceived the required English language exam, TOEFL<sup>7</sup>, for admissions in US universities as more difficult than the corresponding IELTS<sup>8</sup> exam in the UK. For example, although Fangfei, a 27-year-old PhD student, initially applied to universities in both the UK and the US, she later withdrew all the applications to universities in the US because she considered it would be too difficult to attain good scores in the TOEFL exam.

Moreover, migrants' imaginaries also influence their choice of destination. Scholars have discussed the role of the imagination in motivating youth mobility (see Collins 2013; Nonini 1997; Raghuram 2013). Kim (2011) notes that media consumption of the symbolic west, particularly of the US, which is a major culture exporter that defines cultural tastes and values, shapes the migration aspirations of Asian

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<sup>7</sup> TOEFL stands for Test of English as a Foreign Language. It is a standardised test that is commonly used to measure the English language levels of non-native speakers who wish to enrol in universities in the US.

<sup>8</sup> IELTS is a short form of the International English Language Testing System. It tests the English language proficiency of non-native English language speakers and is widely recognised by universities in the UK.

women. However, the US was also stereotypically perceived to be more “dangerous” and “chaotic” by my informants, who saw “Americans” as more “sexually open” and “violent”, as compared to “British people”. These informants fantasised about living in the UK as a way to “learn proper English”. Those who lived in London also imagined it as a cosmopolitan city “full of history, art, culture and class”. For example, Ling Ling, a 22-year-old student-turned-spouse migrant said,

When I was young, I always thought London was my favourite city, which has a sense of history and class. I wouldn't study in the US because I think gun violence is a huge issue there. I also think the culture and atmosphere in the US is too open. It doesn't feel safe. My parents said they would worry about me if I were to study in the US. They also thought the UK is better for its tradition in education.

Working holiday makers from Hong Kong aged between 18 and 30 years old could choose from a variety of countries to work and live in for a certain period of time, due to the bilateral Working Holiday Scheme established between the government of Hong Kong and countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, Germany, Canada, France, and the UK. At the time of writing, PRC citizens meeting the age and financial requirements are eligible to do a working holiday in Australia and New Zealand, but not the UK. Australia is one of the most popular destinations for Hong Kong working holiday makers due to its long partnership with Hong Kong since 2001. In the year 2015-2016, a total of 6,514 Working Holiday visa applications were received from Hong Kong nationals by the Australian government, which represented the 11<sup>th</sup> most populous sending country (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, Australian Government 2017). However, many of the Hong Kong informants that I spoke to imagined a working holiday in Australia as “fruit-picking”, “boring”, “living in rural farmland” and “lacking white-collar job opportunities”. Owen chose to do a working holiday in the UK instead of Australia in his early twenties. He said,

Although a lot of Hong Kong people go to Australia for a working holiday, I didn't consider going there myself. I don't really like the country. My impression of Australia is just sunshine, beach, and farm work. I am not very interested in any of these. I think London and Sydney are very different too. I think London is more artistic and culturally diverse compared to Sydney.

In a separate example, Vivian also preferred to do a working holiday in the UK, but her reason was more related to her gender imagination of a specific kind of working holiday in Australia. She said,

I have read in the newspaper that many Taiwanese working holiday makers who do fruit-picking jobs in Australia are exploited. They are paid less than minimum wage. Also, if you are a young lady and work in a farm there, it is not safe. I have heard that some young women got sexually assaulted by their boss. And I don't really like picking fruit or doing any farm work as I will get freckles! That's why I chose to come to the UK!

Vivian's imagination of a working holiday in Australia was largely shaped by newspapers and social media, such as Facebook, personal blogs and online forums, which according to her, often give advice to young female travellers, who are perceived as exposed to greater sexual dangers, about how they should protect themselves. When I did a quick search on Google by typing "women taking working holiday in Australia" in Chinese, I easily found newspaper articles and online forums that have titles such as "Exploiting working holiday makers, women use sex in exchange for visa" (Apple Daily 2015), or "Girls, be aware! Taiwanese girls' horrible working holiday experiences in Australia" (Kalika 2013). These online resources describe how young women are threatened to have their salary payments delayed if they refuse to have sex with farm owners. According to Vivian, these kinds of stories were widely known among Hong Kong working holiday makers.

## POLITICAL MOTIVATIONS FOR MIGRATION

As a British colony that had previously been a part of successive Chinese empires, Hong Kong's cultural identification with China is rooted in ethnic-based national identification, but at the same time, Hong Kong's distinctive historical path has also shaped the emergence of a local Hong Kong identity since the 1970s through public activism (Mathews, Ma, and Lui 2008; Veg 2017; Ho, Jackson, and Kong 2017). Hong Kong became a colony of the British Empire after the Qing dynasty ceded Hong Kong island at the end of the First Opium War in 1842. Later on, the Qing dynasty further ceded the Kowloon Peninsula in 1860 and leased New Territories to the British in 1898 for 99 years. As the end of the lease approached, diplomatic negotiations between China and the United Kingdom resulted in Sino-British Joint

Declaration in 1984, in which the UK agreed to handover Hong Kong in 1997, and China would ensure Hong Kong's economic and political systems unchanged for 50 years. In the face of the uncertainty after the handover however, some middle-class Hong Kong people felt compelled to emigrate because they feared that their freedom, their rights, and the rule of law that they had enjoyed would be threatened, and they may no longer be able to maintain the cosmopolitan ways of life that were substantially different from those of "communist" China (Mathews, Ma and Lui 2008).

Scholars have pointed out that Hong Kong has seen a rise or a consolidation of local identity discourses over the past decade (Morris and Vickers 2015; Veg 2017). For example, the June Fourth Vigil, the 2012 Anti-National Education Protest, and the 2014 Umbrella Movement all demonstrate Hong Kong people's determination to advocate localism and local interests. The numerous heightened moments of mass protests in the post-1997 era have witnessed widespread participation from all walks of life, including the middle classes, university students, and secondary school pupils who were born in the 1980s and 1990s. In 2012, the government tried to introduce "Moral and National Education", commonly referred as the "patriotic education curriculum", that aimed to cultivate a sentiment of patriotism for the country and Chinese culture. But Hong Kong rejected the Chinese government's citizenship project through protests.

In 2014, tens of thousands of individuals participated in the Umbrella Movement, a series of spontaneous protests throughout Hong Kong. It was stimulated by the Occupy Central campaign – a civil disobedience protest which began in the centre of Hong Kong in 2013. It later spread to various other areas, including Mongkok, Admiralty, and Causeway Bay, and major city intersections remained closed to traffic for 79 days. It was the first time in Hong Kong's history that people protested at such a scale, with multi-point protests and occupation for such a long time. These big protests reflect deep public concern and anxiety about the "loss" of Hong Kong people's ways of life, which had crystallised over the long period of British colonial rule, and their frustration towards the political system of "One Country, Two Systems", the incapability of the Hong Kong government, and a distrust of the Chinese government. The most recent large-scale protests that began in June 2019 and have shown no sign of quieting down, were triggered by the Hong Kong



government's proposed bill, which if passes, would allow transfers of fugitives to mainland China. The introduction of the bill caused widespread criticism as people feared it would erode Hong Kong's legal system. For months, protesters have taken to the streets – at times in the millions.

As local and national identification become more incompatible, and public views for and against local activism become more divided, personal and family relationships are impacted. During and after the Umbrella Movement, many friends and family members who have different political views stopped speaking to each other (Ho, Jackson, and Kong 2017). In fact, during my interviews, I observed that personal relationships were so impacted by politics and the ongoing protests that although Hong Kong informants were in general more open to talk about politics than their mainland counterparts, they were sometimes cautious to give their opinions. In Hong Kong, the yellow ribbon is the symbol of the pro-democracy camp; and the blue ribbon is the symbol of the pro-Beijing camp. In daily life, people often identify themselves as *wong si* (yellow ribbon), *lan si* (blue ribbon), or neutral. A small number of informants declared their political camp at the outset of the interviews, especially when talking about their political motivation for migration. Kelvin, a 35-year-old PhD student who identified himself as a *wong si*, said the following during our four-hour long interview:

I think things have been changing so fast in the past couple of years in Hong Kong. In fact, I left not long after Chun Ying Leung became the Chief Executive of Hong Kong. I can see how things have deteriorated. A few years ago, if you had asked my wife, she would not have considered moving abroad at all because our families are all settled in Hong Kong. Now my wife and I would seriously consider the possibility of moving abroad and obtaining permanent residency elsewhere.

Even though Kelvin was passionate about politics and closely followed current affairs in Hong Kong whilst living in the UK, he considered it was best to have an "escape route" and obtain foreign citizenship. Ronald, also a self-claimed *wong si*, described Hong Kong's political situation as "deteriorating" too. He said,

I think I am lucky to be able to leave Hong Kong...the UK is a democratic country. If I could stay here, why would I want to return to Hong Kong under the rule of an undemocratic government? I have more freedom here.

During fieldwork, I did not encounter one Hong Kong informant who claimed to be a *lan si*. The research method of snowball sampling allowed me to gain trust from informants easily, however it may have prevented me from approaching informants with certain political views because informants themselves were likely to introduce me to their friends who shared similar values and lifestyles with them. However, I was able to conduct interviews with informants who claimed to be indifferent towards politics and remained neutral between the two political camps. One of these informants was Leon, a 29-year-old PhD graduate, who took no political side but felt tired of living in Hong Kong. He said,

I think if you want to change anything in Hong Kong, you need to be in the system to fight it. But I don't want to do it. I think when you feel like you are helpless in a society, all you can do is leave.

Wallace, who participated in the Umbrella Movement and claimed he was on the front line when the police fired tear gas to disperse peaceful demonstrators outside the government headquarters on 28 September 2014, said he had not been as "hot-blooded" since then. He said,

People may say to me, "you don't fight for your own freedom anymore". Yes, I don't. I have accepted the fact that China has ruled Hong Kong. There are two things you can do. You can accept it, or you can resist it. I have accepted it, but I chose to move away.

Although not all informants had a clear political stance, their perceptions of Hong Kong's political situation were shaped by their friends and families who informed them of the "reality" of today's Hong Kong. Despite leaving Hong Kong for non-political reasons, Victoria now saw her migration as a wise decision because of what she learnt from her friends in Hong Kong. She said,

I am upset by the political situation in Hong Kong. Some of my friends want to emigrate but they can't. They always say to me, "don't come back unless you have no choice". I think they may be a bit envious of me because I can move away but they can't.

The majority of my mainland Chinese informants were reluctant to talk about politics or criticise the Chinese government during interviews. One informant openly said to me that she had to be careful about what she said because she knew that "there are Chinese students living abroad who collect information for the Chinese government". With a cautious attitude, most of them, however, did not hesitate to

criticise food safety and pollution issues in China. For example, Alice, a PhD student, said that one of her main motivations for remaining in the UK rather than returning to China was the comfortable living environment and the better air quality that she could enjoy. Georgia, who had been living in the UK for over a decade, said “my husband and I consider that air pollution is too big of a problem in China now. We are worried that if we go back, our health will be jeopardised.” The more liberal informants openly expressed how they did not feel safe in China for political reasons. Transnational migration, permanent residence, and citizenship of a foreign country are considered parts of an escape route for when China is no longer regarded as a good place to live (Delury and Schell 2013). For instance, Lin Lin was married to a PhD student from China who planned to develop his career in London after graduation. Lin Lin wanted to remain in the UK and expressed her concern about the vulnerability and safety of Chinese middle-class in the context of an unstable political environment . She said,

I am worried about the political situation in China. I am not sure what will happen next. Sometimes there is news about middle-class businessmen in China who have suddenly disappeared or got caught by the police for no reason. I worry that this might happen to us one day...I just don't feel too safe in China.

Sofia, a 25-year-old migrant who had family members involved in politics and business, said,

China's political atmosphere is very intense. You may not notice it from the outside, and you may think that things are very peaceful and normal, but the truth is political earthquakes and power struggles happen all the time. Everything in China is temporary; nothing will stay permanently.

Similarly to Lin Lin, Sofia now felt unsafe living in China after being exposed to news about China reported by western media. She said,

It is only after I moved to the UK that I know what actually happens in China. In China, we only have one search engine – Baidu – and it works closely with the government. Baidu blocks sensitive information from the general public. But living here in the UK allows me to see and know things from uncensored resources, and that gives me a different perspective. I have more freedom to access information. I now know China is constantly changing. Its international status has also changed from time to time. In China, most people believe that our country is getting stronger and we live in a very peaceful country. We think our economy is doing so well that a bubble economy is impossible. We all think we live a much better life

compared to people in North Korea. But now I know we often live under the lies of the government. Sometimes the reality is not like what the government wants us to believe in.

These quotes are valuable data that reflects how Chinese young adults understand politics in China. When I was a postgraduate student in Hong Kong in 2011, I noticed it was difficult to get mainland Chinese students to talk about their political views. I still remember the awkwardness and silence when I naively invited some Chinese friends to attend the June Fourth Vigil. Hence, I anticipated the difficulty of getting my Chinese informants to talk about their political motivations for migration, but I did not expect the openness of some informants during the research interviews.

Among all of the mainland Chinese informants, Ying was the most vocal about her discontent with the corruption and bureaucracy of the one-party government. She explained to me that her father, who was a professor at a university, had always been her biggest inspiration. Exposed to western literature and books about Chinese modern history that were banned by the Chinese government, she was not aware of how different her political views were from her peers, who “were brainwashed by the regime”, until she started university in China. She was shocked that some of her classmates did not believe the Tiananmen Square Massacre had actually happened in 1989. She said,

I am very against the communist party. I support the self-determination and independence of Hong Kong. I agree that Taiwan is a country that is separate from China... If I return to China, I want to teach students in university to have critical thinking and not to believe in everything that the Chinese media says. But I am also worried that I would be caught doing this in China. Since President Xi came to power, my friends and I all feel that the state has tightened its control on us.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC MOTIVATIONS FOR MIGRATION

In this study, while more Hong Kong informants than their mainland counterparts described relentlessly rising house prices “back home” as a key motivation for moving abroad, more mainland Chinese informants than the Hong Kong cohort

commented that “complicated” and “insincere” Chinese social relationships were a push factor for migration.

Regarding my first observation, this is not to say that mainland Chinese informants were not pressured by the rise of property prices in cosmopolitan mega cities in China, such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou. However, in comparison, Hong Kong informants tended to be more concerned with their inability to afford a home, which would affect their quality of life and their vision of a future in which they can fulfil their expectations of marrying and rearing children. Belle, who was married to an Englishman, said,

I’ve always liked Hong Kong. But now I am married, I have to think about housing, I think in this aspect, London is better and more affordable. The property market in Hong Kong is just crazy. If you don’t have parents to help you, it is almost impossible to own a place in Hong Kong. After getting married, it is likely that you will need to live with your in-laws. I could imagine the situation which is just unbearable to me.

Karmen, who had been a full-time nurse in Hong Kong, was also keen to get on the property ladder before migrating. She said,

I think I earned quite a lot in Hong Kong, but I still couldn’t own a place. I have friends who are a couple and they each earn HK\$60,000 to 70,000 per month (roughly £6,000-£7,000). But they still haven’t been able to afford a place. I think housing is a big issue in Hong Kong. That’s why I wanted to move away and seek a different life.

Due to the neoliberal policy adopted by the Hong Kong government, the property market is largely controlled and monopolised by big property developers. Strong demand from foreign buyers and their flood of money have pushed an increase in property prices for decades. The limited public housing built by the government cannot meet the heavy demand from Hong Kong people, especially those who find private housing unaffordable. According to the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Study conducted in 2018, which looked at 309 housing markets in the world. Hong Kong has been ranked as the world’s least affordable housing market for a ninth consecutive year. The survey uses the “mean multiple” approach, which divide the median house price by the median household income. In 2018, average home prices in Hong Kong were 21 times the gross annual median household income (Demographia 2019). In second place was

Vancouver with a home-price to median-income ratio of 12.6, meaning it would take an average of 12.6 years to save enough money for a house.

In general, it is now not uncommon for young adults with a median or even higher income to continue to stay with their parents after getting married, with one spouse moving into another spouse's family home. While home ownership has become a distant dream for many, and even rental property prices are extremely expensive, Hong Kong informants reassessed the image of Hong Kong as a "land of opportunity" (Lui 2014b), and considered that moving abroad could be a better option. Joy, a 23-year-old working holiday maker from Hong Kong, was originally a student migrant who stayed on in the UK after the completion of her first degree. Unsure about whether or not she could continue her stay after the expiration of her current visa, she expressed her concern about having to move back to Hong Kong eventually. She said,

I have a friend who graduated in the same year as me, but instead of staying here, she returned to Hong Kong immediately and moved back in her parents' home. She told me she felt like her parents do not seem to understand that she is now a grown-up who lived abroad for three years on her own. She is frustrated that they don't treat her like an adult at all. This makes me worried because I can imagine the same could happen to me. I could not afford to live separately from my parents either if I moved back to Hong Kong.

Hong Kong is not the only city with soaring property prices. Housing affordability is also a major issue in some of the larger cities in China, such as Beijing, Hangzhou, Nanjing, and Shanghai. In spring 2010, the Chinese government attempted to halt the rise in housing prices by raising the down payment requirement across the country as a whole, increasing the minimum mortgage interest rates, and imposing home purchase restrictions (Chen, Funke, and Mehrotra 2016).

According to an article from Forbes, an American business magazine, an average 1,000 square foot apartment in Shanghai costs 5 million yuan (or £567,450).

Property prices for some neighbourhoods in Shanghai have risen by 40% in the past five years. However, Shanghai's average monthly salary is 7,108 yuan, which is around £700 (Rapoza 2017). Despite the fact that home buyers are required to put up at least 20% equity in their homes, housing prices in major cities in China are still soaring. This partly shows the deep wealth inequalities in China, in which a small

number of people are able to own multiple property assets, when many others struggle to afford one.

The strong demand for housing can also be explained by the close correlation between property ownership and marriage, and the cultural expectation on the groom's family to buy a house before marriage (see chapter 6). Few young middle-class Chinese people that I interviewed had already owned a flat in China in first or second-tier cities before coming to the UK with financial help from their parents (see also Fincher 2014). Those who had not yet owned a property said they expected to receive financial help from their parents to purchase a home either in China or in the UK in the future. Most mainland Chinese informants did not consider the continuous rise in property prices in China as a major push factor for them to seek alternative lives abroad. This is very different from the Hong Kong informants who repeatedly expressed this concern, and considered financial help from parents as less taken-for-granted.

For Gina and Victoria, the attractiveness of living in the UK originated from their imagination and understanding of what constitutes a "good life", and their belief that such a life is not attainable in the social environment of Hong Kong or China. They talked about how achieving work-life balance and a new cosmopolitan lifestyle were goals that they set for themselves in the UK. Gina, a 30-year-old woman who previously worked as a nurse in Hong Kong, said,

I was mentally prepared to earn less in London than I did in Hong Kong before I came here. I told myself I had to stop working like crazy in Hong Kong for a while. It was just too much. I came here to try something new and to live differently. I wanted to travel to Europe.

Gina's words echo those of Victoria, a 36-year-old Hong Kong migrant who was married to a British-born Chinese man in Scotland. Having a part-time job in a Chinese church, she said,

When I am tired, I allow myself to slow down a bit. But I can also work a lot when I have the energy. In Hong Kong, you can't afford a life like this. People will look down on you if you only have a part-time or freelance job. You have to work constantly.

Lin Lin was a 28-year-old woman from mainland China who stayed in the UK through being a student dependant. She said she liked the spacious environment,

low population density, and slow pace of life in London, as compared to her hometown Shanghai. Lin Lin particularly enjoyed the relatively slow dining experiences in London. Urban life in China, as Lin Lin commented, is all about “move, move, and move” with no time to stop or relax.

In a separate example, Ronald, a 24-year-old student migrant, said,

Hong Kong gives you lots of pressure. Everyone wants to buy a flat but not many people can do so. And if you don't have a university degree, you are worthless; your life has no value at all. Once you graduate, you earn about HK\$10,000 (£1,000) or even less, or maybe you won't even be employed.

Many informants described work pressure, intense competition, an unfavourable work environment, long working hours, and low wages as some of the reasons for migrating to the UK temporarily. For instance, Karmen decided to leave Hong Kong because of her dissatisfaction with her job and poor management at work. She worked in the intensive care unit of a hospital for five years before coming to the UK. She said,

My department's employee turnover rate was very high. It provides training for staff in the beginning but after a while, you have to rely on yourself if you want to learn something new. This could be very dangerous. When I worked there, my manager thought that I was capable of handling a lot of things, even though I didn't receive proper training. I was constantly worried that if anything happened to my patients, I would be the first one to be blamed; my face would be shown on the front page of the newspapers; and I wouldn't be able to keep my nursing licence. I have high standards for myself. I don't want to become one of those people who only sit around and pray that nothing bad happens to them during work. I want to become someone who can be brave enough to give opinions in front of managers, but not just receive orders. I thought I couldn't change anything if I continued to stay there so I left.

Some informants from mainland China described Chinese social relationships as “complicated”, “insincere”, “superficial” and “instrumental”, which became one of their motivations for moving away. But no Hong Kong informants said they moved because of this. Hoping to work in academia after graduation, Ying described academic publication in China as entirely about networking, but not necessarily related to the quality of the work. She said, “In China, you often need to beg people for help and know someone who can help you. This makes me very unhappy. Chinese social relationships are more troublesome and complicated than relationships in the UK”.



Sofia's family background and social circle had also shaped her understanding of the "national characters" of Chinese people as "materialistic" and "instrumental". Although these characteristics are not Chinese-specific, and could be argued to be common features of social elites and businesspeople of other nationalities, Sofia insisted that "it is the Chinese people who always try to take advantage from their own people". She described Chinese social relationships as "suffocating", "insincere" and "over-competitive". She said,

If people approach you, that's because of your value and your status. If I didn't have any value, they wouldn't be close to me anymore. Since I was small, I understood that people approached us or behaved in certain ways because of my father's influence. This kind of socialising work is very tiring. That's why I want to stay in the UK.

## YOUNG CHINESE WOMEN'S MIGRATION FOR LOVE, RELATIONSHIPS, MARRIAGE PROSPECTS AND AN IDEAL ENVIRONMENT FOR THEIR FUTURE OFFSPRING

Many female informants in this study hoped to explore romantic opportunities, maintain an existing relationship, and secure a life-long partner through living in the UK. In chapter 4, I will discuss in detail how the Chinese state-sponsored discourse of *sheng nu* (leftover women) pressures young single women in China, and how such discourse travels across borders through TV and social media to impact the way Hong Kong women view the timing of marriage. I will also examine how some women hoped to escape from social stigma of singlehood and enter marriage by migrating. None of the male informants, regardless of their sexual orientation, told me that looking for romance was one of their motivations for migration.

Within my interview sample of migrants who had a relationship prior to their arrival in the UK, more young women than men moved to accompany their partner to the UK. This is not to say that Chinese men do not move for their partner (Yi Fung's case is a good example), but it was not a common pattern among my informants. If the men in my study did move for their partner, it was for a life-long partner, i.e. their wife, but not a girlfriend.

However, very few female migrants who moved with their boyfriend ended up staying with the same man after arrival. This includes those who came to the UK after their boyfriend had already settled in the country for a period of time. For instance, Binyu came to the UK to study for a master's degree because of her previous relationship. She said,

When I first came to the UK in 2011, my ex-boyfriend was already studying here. I decided to move after him. But when I finally made it here, I found out that he had been seeing another girl, so we broke up. But I was still very thankful because if I hadn't come here for my past relationship, I wouldn't be with my husband now.

Rose, a 28-year-old PhD student from mainland China, was also motivated by her ex-boyfriend to study in the UK. The couple broke up shortly after arrival. She is now in a relationship with an Englishman whom she met a year ago. She said,

My ex-boyfriend encouraged me to come to the UK. He said that's what he wanted to do. At the time, I had taught in China for three years and life had become very boring and repetitive. I thought to myself if I didn't learn more new things now, it would be too late. Although we broke up in the end, I didn't feel too bad about it because he inspired me to get a PhD.

Rose's experience was similar to that of Sarah, a 26-year-old PhD student who decided to follow her husband (then-boyfriend) after he received an offer to undertake a PhD from a university in the UK. She said,

My original plan was to return to China after getting my master's degree from the UK, and then work for a few years before doing a PhD in the UK. I always thought that it would be a disadvantage for me if I didn't accumulate any work experience before starting my PhD. But my mum thought I would be wasting my time. She worried that I would be too old to get married if I did it the way I planned. It is really strange but many parents in China believe that women who have a PhD are not able to get married. Then my mum said, "go get married and have kids first, and then you can continue your study". I don't know if it is the same for Hong Kong people but in China, many people think that *nu bo shi* (women with doctorates) are very strange. They are highly educated but remain single. People don't see *nu bo shi* as very respectable. In the end, I came back to the UK straight after the completion of my masters' because of my husband. In a sense, it was very practical because he got a PhD offer at the time so if I hadn't stayed in the UK with him, we would have had to do a long-distance relationship for four years. In the end, I decided to forget about my original plan.

Binyu, Rose, and Sarah all came or returned to the UK because of their partner's educational migration trajectories. All considered it a "practical" decision to prevent having a long-distance relationship, which could lead to a break-up. At the same time, these migrants were financially supported by their Chinese parents who encouraged them to move in order to maintain their existing relationship and protect the prospect of marriage. These parents were worried that their daughter would become single or even worse, *sheng nu*, if they stayed in China, while their boyfriend moved away.

Women also tended to extend their stays due to relationships developed in the UK. For instance, Meggie was a 29-year-old Tier 2 work visa holder who first came to the UK as a postgraduate student. She chose to prolong her stay to maintain her previous relationship through enrolling in another postgraduate programme. Although she broke up with her ex-boyfriend before completing her second master's degree, she managed to find a visa-sponsored job after graduation. She is now in a

relationship with a Pakistani man who has British permanent residency. Ying Men, a 32-year-old student-turned-spouse migrant, had also been prolonging her stay in London because of her relationship with a Greek national. Since she considered China would be an unfavourable work environment for her husband, who could not read or speak Chinese, and her chance of getting a good job in Greece was minimal, she thought staying in London was possibly the best option for a transnational couple like them.

Previous research has discussed how young Chinese migrants who have long-term migration goals tend to see temporary migration as a starting point for life-course transitions (Kajanus 2015; Fong 2011). Very few women that I interviewed challenged the taken-for-granted life-course of marriage and childbearing, despite their migration experiences and exposure to new cultural influences (see chapter 4). For some, marriage, family formation, and even the happiness of their future offspring were already on their mind before they left China or Hong Kong. For instance, at the age of 30, Hong Kong Chinese woman Gina felt like she was ready to settle down with her British partner, whom she met shortly after arriving in the UK. At the time of interview, the couple had been together for a year, and were living together. Gina hoped to start a family eventually in the UK. She said,

I understand that every country has its own problems. I also understand that leaving Hong Kong doesn't guarantee a paradise abroad. But Hong Kong kids are very unhappy. Nowadays, Hong Kong parents have to apply for a place in kindergarten before their kids are even born, otherwise their kids won't stand a chance of getting into a good school. You have to plan everything for your children. I just think this makes me very uncomfortable. The first time I noticed how big the parental pressure is in our society is when I first started to work in the maternity ward in a hospital in Hong Kong. I saw a fax at work. It was an advertisement for a nursery school. I wondered why this was sent to our department. Then someone told me it belongs to my colleague, Joanna. I couldn't believe it because Joanna's baby hasn't even arrived in this world yet. All the kids in Hong Kong are expected to know a few different languages and some musical instruments. It is a very stressful life. Kids in Hong Kong don't have time to play. They have a lot of homework and extra-curricular activities to do every day. They can't rest until 10pm or 11pm. Why do we demand so much from our kids? I don't want to raise my kids in Hong Kong at all.

Gina considered herself a "victim" of the highly stressful academic environment in Hong Kong and aspired to raise her future children in the "freed" learning environment abroad that would, in her imagination, allow them to enjoy "real

childhood". A similar narrative was expressed by other female informants who were married or already had children.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, I have discussed the search for hope, love, success, flexibility, and opportunities in the UK among young middle-class migrants from Hong Kong and mainland China. Academic reputations, employment prospects, and professional advancement are some of the pragmatic reasons that Chinese temporary migrants choose to move to the UK, but migrants' motivations are multiple, and are related to their life goals and aspirations, their dissatisfaction with their lives, and their imaginations of the "west", especially the destination country. In this chapter I have also discussed the role of migrants' parents in shaping the courses of their migration trajectories. Drawing on data collected from interviews with migrants, I have explained that their middle-class parents considered international education a spatial strategy to bypass the local education system and accumulate more valuable cultural capital. In addition, in some Chinese families, the timing of daughters' migration is related to their age and relationship status. Due to the societal pressure on young women to follow the feminine life script to get married, and the close correlations between marital mobility, the prospect of marriage and international education, the timing of migrant women's migration (and the family support they receive for migration) is determined by whether they are in a relationship, the likelihood that the relationship will last, and whether the length of their programme of study or the length of temporary stays will impact their chance of marrying. This chapter has also discussed young Chinese migrants' socio-economic and political motivations for leaving home in search of a "better life" for themselves and their future offspring. However, as migrants' transnational sojourning continues, they may encounter obstacles to realising their aspirations, and discover that expectations and reality do not always coincide; matters which I will explain in chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 2

### NAVIGATING CLASS: THE PIG'S LIVER AND THE LOBSTER

I met David, a 33-year-old lecturer, at a café in the London university where he worked. The café was busy that evening, packed with students and university staff. David was a tall, intellectual-looking Chinese man, who wore a formal shirt, dark trousers, and glasses. I found a table while David queued to order some food. He returned with a slice of cake and two forks, and offered to share the cake with me. I automatically responded to his offer according to the cultural code that I have learned throughout my life: to first express my gratitude, then decline the offer, then allow the person to offer again, and finally either gratefully accept or firmly decline with politeness. As we both behaved appropriately, the atmosphere was relaxed, which facilitated the interview afterwards. For our first ever meeting, David and I happily shared a portion of food without feeling any awkwardness. It occurred to me that even though we were strangers, this way of socialising was acceptable to us because we were from the same ethno-cultural background; I imagine that the same behaviour with a British acquaintance would have seemed less acceptable.

David left China and migrated to the UK more than a decade ago. I considered him a more established migrant than some of my other informants who had only lived in the UK for a couple of years. As a result, when I asked David how he perceived his class status in the UK, I made an assumption and said, “you have done so well in your career! You must consider yourself a proper middle-class in London now.” To my surprise, he replied,

I think I can't fit into the class system in the UK because we are talking about two different class systems here. For British people, social class is about what you wear, where you live, what you eat, how you commute...it is about your lifestyle, your educational background, etc. I grew up in China, and that's why sometimes I have certain behaviours that British people may consider as “posh” and some are seen as “very working-class”. For example, I love eating pig's liver...people here would not eat it. They think only working-class people or Scottish people would eat food like this. But I love it. And I love eating lobster too. In this case, people may think I am so posh because I am willing to spend a lot on it.

David regards food culture and culinary taste as an important signifier of one's class status. Class distinction and cultural boundaries exist within, but also of course beyond, food practices.<sup>9</sup> Class as an experience or an analytical concept is ambiguous and vague. According to Guo (2016, 2), "the single term 'class' is a shorthand to describe groups ranked in a hierarchical order, structures of material inequality or an individual's social attributes, or to indicate social standing or prestige." Reay (2005, 911) states that class is produced and operated through "feelings of ambivalence, inferiority and superiority, visceral aversions, recognition, abjection and the markings of taste". Bourdieu's (1986) approach to class concerns not only a hierarchical mode of distinction based on economic structures, but a distinction reproduced through everyday practices, including consumption practices.

A dominant British view of class, which contradicts what David describes in his quote, sees class as more than just practices of consumption or spending; it is "something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being" (Kuhn 1995, 98). Although this statement makes class sound like a mysterious entity, it definitely holds a certain degree of truth in contemporary British society. An article about the class pay gap in Britain published by the Guardian in February 2019 echoes to Kuhn's statement. The authors argue that the individuals in elite occupations, such as accountancy, who are considered to be more trustworthy are those who display "corporate 'polish' – encompassing formal dress and etiquette, interactional poise and an aura of gravitas" (Friedman and Laurison 2019). They further suggest that the assessment of whether a person is "posh" or not is made not by any formal means, but through a "instinctive gut feeling". This idea that people can rely on an intuitive sense to determine one's class status echoes Kuhn (1995).

Literature on the transnational mobility of Chinese students emphasises the value of overseas education in the making of middle-class status (e.g. Ong 1999; Tsong and Liu 2009; Tu 2016; Waters 2012). Very often, self-funded international students are considered to come from a middle-class or upper middle-class background (Waters 2006). I was initially interested in interviewing informants about class for the purpose

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<sup>9</sup> For example, see Cappellini, Parsons, and Harman's (2016) article on how culinary taste helps to maintain middle class identity in a working class context in the UK.

of justifying them as “middle-class” migrants. Questions about “class” came under the “Individual family background” section of my interview guide, and I assumed that such questions would be answered straightforwardly (see appendix). However, they in fact triggered some interesting discussions about class identity, class aspiration, and anxiety. This chapter will explore the complexity of “class” in migration. It will show that the definition of class employed by nation-states may be different from the social representations understood by social scientists, which may also be different from how people think of class, and how they see their class and socio-economic positioning. In the next chapter, I will adopt a Bourdieusian-inspired analysis of different forms of capital, but already in this one I will show how the different discourses or experiences point to the relevance of the “capital” approach.

In this chapter, I first discuss how “class” is understood and what “middle-class” means in three geographical and cultural contexts: mainland China, Hong Kong, and the UK. I argue that class particularly matters to the young Chinese migrants in this study as they desired to be recognised as middle class or they wished to display characteristics which would make them being seen as a successful member both in China or Hong Kong where they came from, and in the UK. On the one hand, my informants hoped to achieve their own and familial expectations to reproduce middle-class status through studying or working in the UK. On the other hand, class is embedded in young migrants’ everyday lives in the UK as they try to legitimate their belonging to the new environment. Class is experienced through interactions and negotiations with the host society and self-reflection (for example, see Thatcher and Halvorsrud 2015).

Here, I should make it clear that “class” was not a topic that my informants spontaneously talked about. Some informants admitted that they found it hard to talk about class. I will show that strong feelings of doubt and insecurity persist within migrants’ narratives of class. Towards the end of this chapter, I will argue that the temporalities of migration and the temporality of class work simultaneously to shape temporary migrants’ class identity.

## BEING MIDDLE-CLASS IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA



The Chinese middle class features widely in public debate in China and generates great interest within and outside of China. Rocca (2017) explains that there is a common consensus among both Western and Chinese scholars about the existence of a Chinese middle class but the group cannot be defined easily. He states (p. 3) that,

Objective criteria, such as education, income, occupation and level of consumption, are all difficult to measure in China, while subjective criteria, such as lifestyle, manners, political ideas and identification with a social figure, leave plenty of room for interpretation.

Both Rocca (2017) and Goodman (2014) talk about how analysing the middle class through research methods such as large-scale surveys can be problematic, as results are often biased due to the way scholars frame their questions. Rocca (2017: 4) also explains the difficulties in defining the group, as there are a variety of terms that scholars use, and their meanings are at odds with one another, e.g. middle property stratum (*zhongchan jieceng*), middle property class (*zhongchan jieji*) intermediate class (*zhongjian jieceng*) and middle income stratum (*zhongdeng shouru jieceng*). Moreover, in the Chinese language, there is no clear distinction between plural and singular forms, thus there is no way to express “whether the middle class is a collection of different strata (the middle classes) or a coherent class” (p.4).

According to Goodman (2016, 1), since 2002, the emergence of China’s middle-class has become a state-sponsored discourse with “uncertain sociological foundations”. While the middle classes are identifiable, they are mostly associated with the Party-state and are found mainly in the public sector. They constitute no more than 12% of the Chinese population. The majority of the population is still either farmers or working-class, including urban workers and rural migrants. This poses the question of whether or not the middle-class is a discourse rather than a social structure.

Interested in the social meanings of being middle class in China, Rocca (2017) looks at “the middle class” as a way of thinking and a new social imaginary that China is embracing. He explains that the normative approach of locating China’s middle class results in confusion because every definition of the middle class

conceals a hidden agenda. While academic scholars turn their attention to accounting criteria nicely presented in statistics and scientific discourse, private consulting companies are interested in assessing the middle class based on their consumption behaviours. Those who consider the middle class as a political force to facilitate political changes try to collect data on political views so as to predict their political actions, e.g. protests. By contrast, Rocca (2017) argues that the size and the precise characteristics of the middle class are irrelevant and insignificant because they cannot be separated from the social imaginaries and hidden agendas.

Interviews with both mainland Chinese and Hong Kong informants about their understanding of class and their class identity show that responses were often diverse and sometimes contradictory. Differences in social and historical developments between China and Hong Kong also shape how the two cohorts perceived the question of class. For some mainland Chinese informants, the first immediate response to my question about class (*jieji*) was to follow the old political script as proclaimed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP): *China is a classless society in which all are equal*. For example, an informant said to me, “I don’t know whether you are aware...but we don’t have the idea of class in China.” Another informant said, “I don’t think the way we understand class in China is the same as in the West because our modern society is built upon socialist ideals.” Interestingly, the same informant had the following to say:

I think life is not about absolute equality. If I grew up in a very poor family, or if I had no parents, or if I had to take care of two young siblings in my family, then I wouldn’t have even dared to dream about studying abroad. I would have had to work in a factory to make a living. I know there are many families in China who don’t have the resources like I do...It [studying abroad] is something that many families in China cannot afford, a luxury that many cannot enjoy.

Contradictory narratives like this make an analysis of mainland Chinese informants’ class identity an interesting and difficult job. On the one hand, it is clear that the process of political education and the state’s indoctrination has impacted some informants’ understanding of class more than others, to an extent that it has almost become a natural reflex to approach the issue of class with the standard answer. On

the other hand, these informants also acknowledged that social stratifications exist in modern China; some even understood that they were the ones who benefitted from the current system.

Contemporary China is founded on a class-based political system, which originated in Marxist-Leninist ideology and was further developed in Maoist class analysis. When the CCP came to power, every citizen was officially given a specific class. Those who were assigned the “red” class background were people who had fought or died on the CCP side, or those who were workers or poor peasants. A “red” class background provided these people with better access to education, work, and marriage opportunities. On the contrary, those who were rich, former exploiters, or resisted the CCP, received the “black” class label and were discriminated against. The “bad class” and their descendants had limited life chances and were the least desirable in the marriage market (Unger 1984). During the Mao era and the Cultural Revolution, an individual’s “class” determined not only their life chances, but also those of their children and even grandchildren.

The Mao era was a chaotic time; the poorest peasants and workers, who used to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy, were suddenly told that they were the leading citizens of the New China. This new social hierarchy created by state intervention in the 1950s resulted in a huge social and psychological upheaval. In the post-Cultural Revolution period, more “normal” hierarchies of production, technocracy, and bourgeoisification with aspirational class identities were restored, due to the development of a semi-market economy (see Jacka, Kipnis, and Sargeson 2013, 199–216). Since the Reform Period in the 1980s, a Weberian approach to social status and stratification has characterised how the Chinese state and the majority of the public think about “class”: as something that is shaped by market structures and employment relationships (see Goldthorpe and Erikson 1992).

Since the 1980s, members of the Party-state and their families have accumulated great wealth. From the state’s perspective, the great economic disparities between the rich and the poor, corruption, and the abuse of power by officials, have contributed to social discontent, which the Chinese government hopes to resolve by developing a middle-class society that would act as a force for stability, good governance, and economic progress (Goodman 2014). Due to the strong political

interest of the CCP in researching and locating the Chinese middle-class, there has been an “academic fever” (Li 2010, 57) over China’s social stratification, as scholars attempted to develop new Chinese class schemas (see Lin and Wu 2009; Liu 2009).

Instead of precisely locating the Chinese middle class, which Rocca (2017: 118) suggests is impossible, he states that we can grasp the middle class by analysing the content of the Chinese middle class’s lifestyle with the definition given by Gérard Mauger, that is, “a set of practices and/or representations specific to a social group”. In post-Mao China, every rich person has become rich recently. There is no traditional bourgeoisie or aristocracy and thus no legitimate practices and representations to imitate. Chinese people are learning to behave as modern subjects and undergoing a “civilizing process”, which according to Rocca (2017: 120), is “a gradual standardization and sophistication of manners and opinions among the population”. The main subjects of this process are the middle class.

The state plays an important role in encouraging middle-class aspirations and cultivating modern citizens by promoting terms such as *wenming* (literally, “civilization”), *suzhi* (quality) and *hexie shehui* (harmonious society), all of which aim to improve the quality of the population. *Suzhi*, in a neoliberal way, when referred by the Chinese state, has a closer meaning to “human capital” or “embodied human qualities”. In the pre-1980s context, it referred primarily to qualities that are resulted from both nature and nurture, and are not merely inborn attributes (Kipnis 2006; 2007). For the Chinese state and neoliberal theorists, a nation can build up its *suzhi* or human capital by training or educating citizens. In China, it is widely held that people should cultivate their *suzhi* through education and hard work (Lin 2011).

Despite the state’s direction, Rocca (2017) argues that China’s civilizing process is not a result of institutional enforcement, rather it comes from spontaneous collective social behaviours from the individuals themselves who produce and follow new, blurred and sometimes contradictory norms. The consequence of not following such norms has less to do with state punishment, and more with a situation of marginality. As a result, for the Chinese middle class, who consider education as the basis for acquiring *suzhi*, the usage of the term is more closely related to Bourdieu’s cultural capital (see Ponzini 2020). In Bourdieu’s concept of social distinction (1984),

education as a means to obtain distinction and social status, is essential for individuals to secure middle-class status belonging and separate themselves from the working class. The Chinese middle-class families' willingness to spend a small fortune on their children's overseas education and convert economic capital into cultural capital can be explained by their view of education as one of the most powerful means to strengthen their children's social status in relation to lower classes and maintain social distinction.

Rocca (2017) adopts a more Bourdieusian approach to look at the ways in which the Chinese middle class distinguishes itself and is to be distinguished from the other social groups. Rocca (2017) first talks about the social imaginary created and shared across a broad swathe of the Chinese public about the middle class. He then argues that the imaginary consists of rather few elements that are wealth and culture-related: the middle class are rich (income being the most crucial criterion for belonging to the class); they have a high disposable income; they are home owners<sup>10</sup>; they are car owners; they live in gated communities; they travel abroad and take vacations; they have the means to send their children abroad for education; and most uniquely and importantly, they are the people who behave as conscious citizens.

The last element, as a more cultural criterion, is a slightly different imaginary created by a great majority of urban dwellers tending their own middle-class image and are adopted by people who live in rural areas. Such imaginary of the middle class who is not just rich, but people who have high education and the ability to display high *suzhi* is a good example of Bourdieu's work that shows the kinds of people the Chinese middle class excludes: those who are only able to make money, such as shopkeepers; those who do not have the "right job/status", e.g. peasants and migrant workers; those who are not in the "right environment", for instance living in traditional housing but not gated estates; and those who display "bad behaviours", e.g. spitting on the ground, speaking loudly, eating noisily, dressing without care. Rocca (2017) argues that two kinds of people seem to fit the middle-class profile perfectly: first, technicians and managers working in foreign and private enterprises

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<sup>10</sup> Home ownership in China and elsewhere is a form of "ontological security" which leads to wealth accumulation and reinforces class boundaries (see Saunders 1990).

and transnational companies, and second, “intellectuals” or talented people with a very high level of education.

Moreover, Rocca (2017) observes that some of the Chinese middle classes reject being regarded as rich, or seen as middle class, due to their fear of being judged by their excessive consumption behaviours. They also reject being seen as belonging to the elites who are often “in the system”, that is, having political capital or a position in the government or the party. This middle-class psychology shows that the rule of cultural capital trumping economic and political capital, at least in the eyes of the most educated Chinese middle class, has now been fully developed.

### MIDDLE-CLASS IN CONTEMPORARY HONG KONG

Similar to mainland China, Hong Kong’s middle class is also a new and unstable group. This is because most families have only become middle class in the last two generations. For most of my informants, their grandparents were not middle-class people but refugees or low-skilled workers from mainland China. But different to mainland China, Hong Kong’s class ideologies have not undergone fundamental ruptures. Hong Kong was ruled by the British from 1841 to 1997 and was briefly occupied by Japan from 1941 to 1945 before British rule resumed. Most Hong Kong citizens today are descendants of the first influx of refugee capitalists and workers from mainland China who migrated to Hong Kong in the late 1940s. In the 1950s, skills and capital brought by Chinese refugees, along with a vast pool of cheap labour, helped to build the economy, transforming Hong Kong from an entrepot to a leading East Asian industrial and manufacturing centre. In the 1980s, the opening of the mainland Chinese market and rising salaries in Hong Kong drove many manufacturers north. Hong Kong again transformed its economy and consolidated its position as a regional financial centre and a major tourist destination in Asia.

The shift in the structure of the economy from industry-oriented to finance-oriented has boosted upward social mobility and increased new employment positions (Lui 2014a). Adopting a classification informed by the Nuffield scheme (Goldthorpe 1987), Lui (2014a) identifies classes in Hong Kong based on occupational structure and income level. He observes that the middle class is found among the upper and lower service sector. He also finds that individuals who were born in Hong Kong are

more than two and a half times more likely to attain service class positions. Moreover, those who received more than 13 years of schooling, meaning attaining post-secondary education, are almost 15 times more likely to reach the same class positions, compared to those with a lower educational level (Ibid.: 45). These findings show that there is a close correlation between education and class in Hong Kong.

The social imaginary about the Hong Kong middle class and the ways in which the Hong Kong middle class imagines itself are very similar to that of the imaginary about mainland Chinese middle class and the ways the mainland middle classes perceive themselves. They are rich: they are high-end consumers; they are home and car owners; they live in private instead of public housing estate; they like to travel; they aspire to western citizenship and consider migrating a choice rather than a necessity; and they send their children to international schools in Hong Kong or abroad for education. Ong (1999)'s remarkable work on flexible citizenship, and subsequent works, such as "astronaut families" (Ho 2002), tell the story of Hong Kong Chinese elites and middle class families who emigrated to western countries in the 1990s in pursuit of multiple citizenship, and to help their children to acquire education degree from western universities, which has become increasingly important for class reproduction in Hong Kong, with the strategies of accumulating and converting different forms of capital.

Moreover, I argue, like the Singaporean middle-class Chinese who view migrants from mainland China in Singapore as outside the boundary of "middle class", who in their eyes, are unrespectable, un-middle-class and un-Chinese (Ang 2016), the middle class in Hong Kong also draw ethnic and class boundaries by asserting their own superiority over mainland Chinese who they perceive as possessing only economic capital. They look down on the mainland Chinese tourists who buy brand-name clothing and use "flashy things", and those who try to prove they belong to high-ranking classes by displaying their wealth. They also criticise mainland Chinese tourists for what they consider to be uncivilized and inconsiderate

behaviours in Hong Kong, such as the “kid peeing” controversy<sup>11</sup>, Chinese shoppers buying too much Hong Kong-produced infant milk, Chinese tourists eating in the underground and not giving up their seats to elderly or people who need it more [also see Rocca (2017:148)]. These incidents provoke a lot of sentiments on the Internet with Hong Kong people attacking the mainlanders, who then counterattack with a nationalistic repertoire.

Even the term *suzhi* that is commonly used in mainland China, is criticised by some Hong Kong people, who insist that *zhisu*, or in Cantonese *zatsou*<sup>12</sup>, has always been the “proper” term, which is used traditionally to refer to “human qualities”. They argue that *suzhi* is only a modern term invented by the Chinese communist state in the 1960s, thus is considered as “improper” and “illegitimate” and “inferior” to the term *zhisu* or *zatsou*<sup>13</sup>.

During the process of continual confrontations and adjustments of social imaginaries, both Hong Kong and mainland Chinese middle class understand that being rich is not enough to be considered respectable. In Hong Kong, judgements and criticism of mainland Chinese come from the individuals themselves who form collective values and norms, contribute to the definitions of appropriate attitudes,

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<sup>11</sup> In April 2014, a mainland Chinese couple was filmed letting their toddler urinate in the middle of a busy street in Hong Kong. The video went viral, triggering a huge debate about acceptable standards of behaviour in mainland China and the former British colony of Hong Kong, and violent reactions. For example, an anonymous user of China’s popular online forum called for mainland parents to bring their children to Hong Kong and let them urinate in the streets in protest. This incident was reported by newspapers, such as South China Morning Post and Daily Mail (See Chong 2014; Crane 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Here, and the rest of Cantonese spelling in this thesis, is based on Jyutping, a romanisation system for Cantonese developed by the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong.

<sup>13</sup> See the thread “The debate of *zhisu/zatsou* and *suzhi/souza*” posted on Hong Kong Golden Forum - a popular discussion forum in Hong Kong, in 2014, in which the usage of *zhisu/zatsou* is considered by some users as a marker of Hong Kong identity; others praised those who used *zhisu/zatsou* instead of *suzhi* as people who “respect history and culture” (Anonymous 2014).



behaviours and standards, recognise their naturalness and use them to assess themselves and others.

After the handover of Hong Kong to China, economic operations and political connections between Hong Kong and mainland China increased dramatically. According to Lui (2014b), this has resulted in the formation of divisions within the middle class along the lines of occupation and industry. A split middle class in Hong Kong is observed, whereby a “globally or regionally oriented middle class” who were in commerce, business services, and finance sectors benefitted more from the so-called “China opportunities”, as compared to those who were outside of the business sector. Middle-class professionals, managers, and administrators working in community and social services, such as doctors, lawyers, nurses, social workers, and teachers, were what Lui called the “embedded middle class”, who found their lives less relevant to the “China opportunities”.

While the “globally or regionally oriented middle class” in Hong Kong and the rising middle-class in China both enjoy the fruits of China’s economic success, the embedded middle class in Hong Kong have found the changing political and social situation in the post-1997 era challenging. Political movements and mass rallies since 2003 are considered by scholars such as Lui (2014b) and So (2014), as evidence of the embedded middle classes’ discontent towards a loss of social and political distinctiveness, and a restriction of individual rights and freedom under the influence of China. The responses of the middle classes in Hong Kong towards a growing sense of social and political restlessness are diverse, ranging from active political participation to emigration. Studies have shown that overall, Hong Kong people’s cultural identity has been strengthened since the handover (Mathews, Ma, and Lui 2008; Veg 2017; Ho, Jackson, and Kong 2017).

Interviews with some young people from Hong Kong has shown that they believed to maintain a middle-class identity is to distinguish themselves from the mainlanders. Cher, a Hong Kong informant said,

I am a Hongkongese of course. In fact, I didn’t care about whether I was a Hongkongese or Chinese before. Few years ago, if you ask me, I would say I am a Chinese from Hong Kong. But things are different now. Now I would really want to draw a line between me and those Chinese. I wouldn’t

want to be considered as a Chinese. All the political issues I have witnessed over the past few years, they have affected how I see my grim future in Hong Kong and have made me more determined to stay living in the UK. Especially now that I am married, I would really worry about the future of my children, if I have any. This is not just about hoping my kids to grow up in an English-speaking environment. It is also about I don't want them to learn some of the bad behaviours of mainlanders. I said to my husband that I don't want my kids to grow up in Hong Kong. As a Hongkongese, I see some of the behaviours of mainlanders as inappropriate, but they don't see it the same way because they are from that environment. But I don't want my kids to behave like them.

Cher was sent by her Hong Kong middle-class family to study in the UK on her own at the age of 15 years. Now a married woman, Cher still maintained a very strong Hong Kong identity. Her class identity is reflected by her statement about how she hoped to raise her children in the UK, an English-speaking environment as she emphasised, and teach them about proper behaviours that are arguably more British or Hong Kong, rather than mainland Chinese.

Fiona, a PhD student studying History in the UK also commented,

These days, many people say Hong Kong people who are close to Beijing or pro-Beijing are those who are older and from a lower-class background. They are seen as uneducated.

Gina, a former nurse from Hong Kong, also had her own standard about good qualities or behaviours that is related to her Hong Kong and class identity. She said,

I would say I am a Hongkongese. I have met quite a few Mainland Chinese here who would take a look at you and if they thought you were a Chinese; they would speak to you in Chinese immediately. I think this is rather rude. 90% of them would not even ask whether you speak Mandarin or not. They just assume that you must be coming from China! Very few of them would approach you in English when they first meet you, which they should. This is *universal*, especially when you meet strangers outside of your own country. We, Hongkongese would not do that.

As scholars have suggested, Hong Kong's unique cultural identity originates as a desire to maintain membership among a globally elite group of nations defined by democratic governance and capitalistic economic practices, and to preserve the way of life characterised by mobility oriented away from China (Abelmann et al. 2014; Mathews et al. 2008). Moreover, Shih (1998, 295)'s study on the social constructions of mainland Chinese migrant women in Hong Kong and Taiwan argues,

Without the convenient marker of language or ethnic difference, and without a ready-made discourse of independent national memory and culture, (Hong Kong and Taiwan) cultural imaginaries must turn elsewhere for the recognition, production, and consolidation of difference.

As young Hong Kong people look elsewhere for the production of difference in a transnational setting, class, and more specifically appropriate behaviours associated with class identity, become significant. Hoping to be seen as educated, cultured and coming from a middle-class background mean that young Hong Kong people seek to maintain a profile that is not identified too closely with mainland Chinese.

## BEING MIDDLE CLASS IN CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN

Class awareness has a long history in Britain. Working-class identities were developed from very early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Thompson 2013). In the English notion of class, class is “a discursive, historically specific construction, a product of middle-class political consolidation, which includes elements of fantasy and projection” (Skeggs 2002, 5). The first formal measures of household class were developed by the Registrar General’s Office in 1911. The boundary between the working and middle classes was strongly associated with the difference between “manual” and “non-manual” employment. In contrast to the mainland Chinese and Hong Kong societies, where the middle class is still a new and unstable group, the middle class in Britain has a much longer history; class privileges are passed down from generation to generation and through education and consolidated by social ties and networks.

Income and house value are important criteria to claim or to be allocated to membership of a particular class. Scholars’ interest in the correlation between domestic property and social class can be traced back to the 1960s. Rex and Moore (1967, 273–74) observe that people’s “market situation” determines their “differential access to property”. In the UK, there is a striking divide between those who own and those who rent. Since a house is also a form of investment, those who own a property have a greater sense of security than those who do not. British literature on housing and class often points to how housing inequality and deprivation, and the accumulation of real wealth, results from home ownership and housing inheritance

(see Badcock 1989; Clapham, Kemp, and Smith 1990; Crawford and McKee 2018; Forrest and Murie 1994; Hamnett 1991).

According to the Great British Class Survey (GBCS) conducted in 2013, which was a collaborative work between British sociologists Mike Savage and Fiona Devine, and the BBC, the British class structure has changed from a Victorian system featuring a three-class system (“working”, “middle” and “upper” classes) to a more complex model of class dynamics. The GBCS was a twenty-minute web survey hosted by the BBC, which covered questions on leisure pursuits, cultural tastes, social networks, and economic situation. Economic questions related to household income, savings and house value, highbrow and emerging cultural capital, and information on the number and status of the social ties respondents had. Within a few weeks of going live, over 161,000 responses were received. Over 90% of the survey respondents considered themselves “White”. The GBCS became the largest survey of social class ever conducted in Britain. After performing a “latent class analysis” of the survey data, Savage (2015) proposed seven new social classes based on household income, household savings and house value: elite; established middle-class; technical middle-class; new affluent workers; traditional working-class; emerging service workers; and precariat.

Savage and his research team note that these seven classes do not form a neat hierarchy, despite attempts to rank them according to level of economic capital. While the team is confident with the order of placing the “elites” at the top, followed by the “established middle-class”, and having “precariat” at the bottom, they are less sure whether “new affluent workers” should be placed higher or lower than the “technical middle-class”. They also note that the “traditional working-class” and “emerging service workers” may differ in the balance between their income and house values.

Savage’s seven social classes is different from the nested classification proposed by the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification, which is designed based on the levels of occupation, and is the official socio-economic classification in the United Kingdom. Its eight classes version is most commonly used, and the order of the classes is as follows: higher managerial and professional occupations; lower managerial and professional occupations; intermediate occupations (clerical, sales,

service); small employers and own account workers; lower supervisory and technical occupations; semi-routine occupations; routine occupations; and never worked or long-term unemployed (see Rose and O'Reilly 1997).

I take on Savage (2015)'s class stratification as it is not based purely on the level of employment, but also income level of a household, house value, and a cultural judgement of the social importance and the respectability of one's occupation. Here again, we can see the tensions between economic and cultural capital in defining the middle class. Using Bourdieu's concept of social distinction and theory of cultural capital, Savage wrote the working-class was considered to be "less cultured" and inferior to the middle or non-manual class (see Savage 2015, 33–35) because of their lack of ability to "command claims to cultural snobbery and privilege" (Savage 2015, 39). Having a white-collar job, earning a considerable income, and owning a property and/or car are not adequate to be seen as middle class; rather adapting to the "culture" is equally important to increase one's respectability. In Britain, class distinctions are often drawn along the lines of language, accents, cultural behaviours, and attitudes, but not only on wealth.

In the UK, the hierarchy of tastes is a matured, sophisticated and settled territory. Among homeowners, which area/district a property is located in, the type of property (i.e. a flat, a house, privately owned or council estate), the number of bedrooms and bathrooms, and the magnificence of the garden being among the criteria of judgement. Among people claiming to belong to the middle class, everything can be used as the basis of sophisticated distinctions. Wearing vintage clothing is better than wearing famous trademarks. Sitting down to have dinner round a table is superior to doing so in front of the television. While wine knowledge is appreciated, excessive drinking and obesity are not. Hobbies and entertainment are important to demonstrate one's taste, for example classical music, contemporary theatre and artistic performances are assessed as tasteful activities. The pattern of classification is limitless.

Being unable to converse in a way associated with having "good" education is often presented as a lack of "standards". Middle-class families in the UK, like those in China and Hong Kong, tend to invest a large amount of money in cultivating their children's interests in certain cultural activities and hobbies, such as piano and

French lessons, getting them into good private schools, and placing equal importance on their children's performance in extra-curricular activities as on academic results.

Although most British people, as Savage (2015) notes, continue to identify strong markers of class through the identification of family background and lifestyle, as well as through their interactions with those different to themselves, it has been observed that the British are now engaged with complex "emotional politics" of class (see also Skeggs 2002), due to a general public disdain of the idea of snobbery and class prejudice. As Savage (2015: 366) notes,

Class is important not so much as an overt badge (when people feel proud to belong to a class), but more in the way it prompts moral and emotional reactions, especially negative ones. It matters more which class you do not belong to, rather than which one you think you do belong to.

Talking about class in public is uncomfortable. Although British people regularly distance themselves from the idea of social class, and class snobbery, what they say (or not) about class is different from how they actually enact and perform class in their everyday lives. This goes to the heart of the "new snobbery" that Savage describes in today's class talk.

Similar emotional politics can be observed among my mainland Chinese and Hong Kong informants. Some of them were not comfortable to say they belonged to the middle class, but when they were asked to choose between lower class, middle class and upper class, they selected the middle-class category. As I discussed further in this chapter, it seems to me that just like the British middle class, there is a very complex etiquette about how and when class is talked about among informants from the two cohorts. As highly educated migrants, they refused to be classified as a wealthy person because to admit that would mean that they do not fully acknowledge the resources provided by their family that give them migration opportunities and better life chances, inflicting negative moral and emotional reactions. While informants tended to be careful not to show off their wealth, they narrated stories about the hardship that their grandparents endured and the hard work of their parents (for example, see Gloria's quote below). At the same time, as migrants themselves who had high class aspirations, even if they did not feel they

belonged to the middle class in the UK now, they expressed the hope that they would in the near future.

## CLASS AND MIGRATION

I think I haven't fit in to any classes here...York has many rich retired people. But I am just a student. I think social classes in the UK are not entirely determined by income, but hobbies, temperaments, and habits... I belong to a separate category called "Chinese or Asian immigrants". But in the future, I think I could gradually climb up the social ladder in the UK.

*(Joy, a 23-year-old event organiser who arrived in the UK in 2012)*

Migrants' understandings of class, and of their class identities, are complex and temporary. Fathi (2017) argues that there are limitations in adopting classical theories of class when analysing migrants' accounts. For example, Fathi (2017, 22) states that Marxist, Weberian and Bourdieuan approaches to the study of class lack an attention to "gender, race, belonging and, to a degree, space". She also notes (2017, 25) that while prestige is argued as being an important dimension of the Weberian concept of status, it is not clear as to how prestige would be evaluated when such concept varies in different societies. None of the main theoretical approaches to class, including the Marxist, Weberian and Bourdieuan, consider migration as a factor that may change the class schemata in a society.

In the broader migration literature, the class representations of different groups of migrants are often seen as a manifestation of uneven power relations resulting from global inequalities. At the lower end of a transnational hierarchy we find refugees, asylum seekers, and unskilled labour migrants; in the middle of the spectrum, we locate international students and other middling transnationals who are in less marginal positions; at the top, we see highly skilled and investment migrants, and global elites who enjoy flexible mobility due to their tangible capital and privileged positions. However, we often ignore the facts that refugees or asylum seekers could be coming from a middle-class background in their country of origin, or skilled migrants could only find unskilled jobs after migration. I refer to sociological literature concerning "middling transnationals" and "skilled migrants" to understand

my informants' class position. The term "middling transnationalism" (Conradson and Latham 2005) describes the mobilities of those who are neither transnational elites nor developing-world migrants. According to Smith (2005, 242), "middling transnationals" are those who "occupy more or less middle class or status positions" in both their original and receiving countries. I find these definitions relevant but sometimes too broad for capturing the class dynamics of my informants.

If being self-funded is itself a class signifier, the majority of student migrants in this study do occupy a middle-class status in their country of origin. But where does their money come from? While most informants were funded by their parents only, a minority were supported by a collective fund contributed by their parents, grandparents, other relatives, parents' friends, etc. Some informants who had siblings told me that their family could only afford to send one child abroad. If collective kin support is needed to pursue international education, or if only one sibling can be sent abroad, does this mean that the family is – financially, at any rate - below "middle-class"? It seems to me that heterogeneous manifestations of class position in relation to international education exist but have not been fully explored in previous studies.

While it would be easy to assume that skilled migrants come from a middle-class background in their country of origin, there is, in fact, no universal definition of "skilled migrant". In her study of "highly skilled" middling Singaporean transnationals in London, Ho (2011) quotes Koser and Salt (1997) to show that a clear definition of a skilled migrant cannot be obtained, despite social scientists' efforts to develop a definition based on migrants' skills, qualifications, and experience. Iredale (2001) broadly defines a highly skilled worker as an individual with a university degree or equivalent experience in the field. This definition remains inadequate in light of the fact that many of my informants who studied arts, humanities, and social sciences disciplines at university did not consider themselves "skilled". They commented that they did not acquire any "hard" technical skills that could be useful in the work environment. Even though they were aware that in an idealised neoliberal employment market, the employee is expected to demonstrate "soft" interpersonal skills – skills that their disciplines are known for (Urciuoli 2008) – they did not think that such skills would help them to qualify as skilled migrants in the eyes of the Home Office.



If the sociological categories used in the academic literature are not adequate to help locate my informants' class position, would the stratification of the Home Office be more useful? In recent years, the British visa regime has developed increasingly complicated visa application processes for non-EEA migrants, creating more bureaucratic steps, and making longer lists of fees for visa applicants. Decisions on visa applications are now routinely made according to economic criteria, such as applicants' income and personal wealth. Steadily increasing fees have also become attached to many aspects of visa application processes, such as the healthcare surcharge, the tuberculosis test result which must be obtained at a cost from clinics approved by the Home Office, and so forth. The stratification of the Home Office is manifested in the lists of fees that temporary migrants need to pay prior to arrival; the lists filter out applications who do not have a certain level of financial means.

Skilled migrants from outside the EEA countries can apply for a Tier 2 (General) visa if they are offered a "skilled job" in which they usually need to be paid at least £30,000 per year. This salary is higher than the median annual income in the UK, which was £28,677 for full-time employees in 2017 (Office for National Statistics 2017). The Home Office's stratification and visa requirements give us a clue of the kind of migrants that are welcomed in the UK, who are likely to be coming from a middle-class background in their country of origin, and are unlikely to require the use of the welfare system during their stay in the UK.

However, as I will further explain in chapter 3, not all middle-class well-educated Chinese migrants could take up visa-sponsored jobs in the UK. The way that middle-class migrants experience immediate downward mobility in a new geographical and cultural environment due to the depreciation and the inconvertibility of their cultural capital and symbolic capital has been well-studied (see Fong 2011; Ho 2013; 2014). Although observations of migrants' "class shifts" are relatively common in the migration literature, few studies discuss how migration pushes migrants to become aware of or rethink their own class status, and the markers of the class system in their home countries, as well as those of the new country.

Regardless of how migrants hope to distinguish themselves hierarchically from others, for a social group to be called a class, there must be a common signifier that

is “widely understood and accepted in society” (Guo 2016, 2). However, such a signifier could be slippery in the context of migration. For instance, those who come from a middle-class background in China – a fast-developing economy – may not be considered middle-class by the British society. Similarly, old privileges that used to be associated with one’s class background may lose their meaning in a new cultural environment. In other words, the “middle-class” in the UK and the “middle-class” in China could be conceptually different.

Mobility is a process of ontological negotiations. Geographical mobility creates circumstances where migrants are required to enter a conscious or unconscious process of setting goals, accumulating and deploying capital, and pursuing self-improvement. This process is directly related to migrants’ social mobility and how they perceive their present social position by comparing their lives before and after migration. It is migrants’ reflections on class and their self-fashioning, and how this process of constructing a class identity is constrained by a set of socially acceptable categories and definitions, that I aim to address in the second half of the chapter.

#### MIGRANTS’ SELF-PERCEIVED MIDDLE-CLASS STATUS IN CHINA AND HONG KONG

As a relatively young group (aged between 22 and 36 years old), more than half of the informants relied mainly on the resources provided by their families to pay for their living expenses in the UK. Of the 67 informants, 23 were not in employment or had no income. They were mainly student migrants who did not take up part-time jobs, and fresh graduates who had not yet secured employment in the UK. Additionally, 20 informants were underemployed, earning a net monthly salary of less than £1,000. Ten informants earned a net monthly salary of between £1,000 and £1,999, which they regarded as “insufficient” to accumulate any savings. Only one-fifth of the total number of informants had an income that they felt allowed them to live comfortably; among which ten informants earned between £2,000 and £2,999 a month, and four earned over £3,000. Importantly, nearly all female informants who were in employment said they earned less than their partner in the UK. Although most informants were not in full-time employment or were under-employed, they still

evaluated their self-perceived class status as “lower middle”, “middle” or “somewhere in the middle” based on their family background, educational qualifications, and potential earning power.

Informants’ parents worked in various fields, such as corporate businesses, small-to-medium sized family businesses, secondary or tertiary education, I.T., banking, insurance, and civil services, etc. They saw their parents’ occupation as an important indicator of their own class status. A relatively typical profile of a mainland Chinese informant in this study was having a mother who works as a teacher, and a father who works as a civil servant; or a mother who works as a civil servant, and a father who owns a small-to-medium business. There were also a number of informants who did not come from a dual-income family, with their mother being a housewife, and father being a traditional breadwinner. Here, I include several quotes about migrants’ perceptions of their own class background from both male and female informants from China and Hong Kong.

If I judge my class status based on my family background, I think I belong to the middle-class. My father had a big business in China. Unfortunately, he died because of a car accident. Although my dad has passed away, the company is still running; and our family could afford to send me and my sister to study overseas.

*(BiYu, a 26-year-old mainland Chinese woman who is married to a Scottish man)*

My parents are civil servants. I wouldn’t say our family is rich but we could live a comfortable life in China. I mean, if we were so rich, then my parents could have sent me to study abroad when I was younger, then I could be like my husband who completed his secondary school education here. But we were not.

*(Ling Ling, a 22-year-old mainland Chinese woman who is married to a British citizen originating from Hong Kong)*

I don’t think I am very rich. We have too many rich people in China. My family is not that rich but they can always travel abroad. My parents had also received a university education. It is very impressive because in those days it was very difficult to get into university, so I guess I am definitely middle-class in China.

*(Dai Ming, a 27-year-old mainland Chinese man who is completing his PhD in the UK)*

I think I come from a middle-class family because my parents could afford to send me and my sister to the UK for education. I have had a piano since

I was young. I also know that learning music is quite an expensive hobby in Hong Kong. I now study a music degree in London, and I hang out with friends here who also study music and are good at playing at least one musical instrument. These friends of mine, they come from at least a middle-class, and even an upper middle-class family background.

*(Jessica, a 23-year-old single woman from Hong Kong)*

Informants generally saw their capability to pursue an overseas degree as an important indication of class status. They also often described their lives in China or Hong Kong as “comfortable”, “abundant”, “sufficient”; they have “never eaten bitterness in life” and “never worried about putting food on the table”. Their family could afford to pay for their extra-curricular lessons, such as private tutoring, piano classes and violin lessons, and to send them abroad for education. Informants also evaluated their own class status by making vague comparisons, for example, they did not regard themselves as lower-class people because they “were not entitled for social benefits” or “did not live in a poor area”. Simultaneously, they acknowledged the existence of the super-rich and elites who live a luxurious and extravagant life, and own big houses and expensive cars. In comparison, they regarded themselves as “not as rich” or “just ordinary” with “occasional bourgeois consumption of expensive brands”.

In this research, I find it inadequate to classify my informants’ class status solely based on income level, occupation, and other economic representations because the majority did not have a full-time job. Therefore, I consider educational qualifications and informants’ own self-ascribed class identity as the most relevant indicators of their class status.

## CONFUSION ABOUT CLASS IDENTITY IN THE UK

For some informants, class itself is a vague and unfixed concept. They often found it hard to translate their original class status into the class system of the UK.

I think it is difficult to identify social classes in China because in my parents’ generation, they had nothing, and they built up their lives by working really hard. But I can’t deny that my family is wealthy in China because I was sent to study abroad when I was young. My mum also has a lot of savings that she has already bought a house for herself in the UK. But in the UK, social

class is not just about how much money you have in your bank account. It is also about your lifestyle, temperament, your family background...In China, we can't talk about social classes by looking into all these aspects. We can only differentiate between those who have money and those who don't. Family background as a criterion was more or less removed because of what happened in the past (indicating the Cultural Revolution here). If I judge my social class just by how much money my family has, I guess my family belongs to the upper middle-class.

*(Gloria, a 28-year-old mainland Chinese woman who lives in London with her husband, also a Chinese migrant)*

I think my class status in the UK is lower than what I was in China. But it is really hard to tell because in London, we have many foreigners. We have more foreigners than locals. How do immigrants fit into the British class system? I don't know. But I think my social class wouldn't be too low because my husband belongs to the middle-class here. It is just the ways he talks and socialises with people... his accent is good, and he is quite posh.

*(Mi, a 26-year-old Chinese woman who arrived in the UK in 2013 and works in the fashion industry in London)*

In this study, I observe that the longer migrants were removed from their original social and cultural context, the more uncertain they became in perceiving their own class status in the UK. Chinese migrants who had been living in the UK for an extensive period of time, or were married to a local British person, tended to be more aware of the distinctive features of class in Britain. Very often, they had to adapt to unfamiliar cultural practices and use new logics to understand what it means to be "middle-class" in British society.

In their study of mainland Chinese marriage migrants in Singapore, Zhang, Lu, and Yeoh (2015) looked at how migrants' imagination of cosmopolitan living was very different from the reality they faced in the rural neighbourhoods of Singapore. While brides from mainland China are often seen as coming from "low-class country", they themselves see the Singaporean family that they marry into as "rural", "traditional", and "anything but cosmopolitan and urban" (Ibid., 238), due to the smallness and provinciality of the flat they live in, and cultural clashes in their daily lives<sup>14</sup>. Although

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<sup>14</sup> For example, Zhang, Lu and Yeoh (2015) discover that while urban Chinese migrant wives see dressing up and applying make-up as essential for socialising, and to maintain "face" for their husband, women in Singapore usually only wear "good clothes for important occasions". This cultural difference causes great misunderstanding. In Singapore, when Chinese migrant wives have a makeover, they are seen as trying to be sexually seductive to men other than their husband.

class is not a focus in their study, their discussion of the “problematic process of assimilation or acculturation” (Ibid., 238) in migrants’ daily lives resonates with my observation of my informants, who often rationalised their class experiences as “cultural difference” (*wenhua chayi*). Examples include the case of David which I presented at the very beginning of this chapter, and Mi, who thought that her husband’s “posh” English accent and socialising behaviours helped to increase his respectability. Mi had learnt that although the link between accent or language and class is weak in the Chinese context, in the UK, a person’s accent is a very important reflection of their class position.

### SUSPENSION OF CLASS-RELATED PRIVILEGES IN THE UK

For those who had work experience before migrating to the UK, a reduction in income generated a sense of insecurity about their middle-class status. However, for most informants, this was generally understood as a sacrifice they were willing to make and a temporary situation. For instance, Karmen, a 31-year-old personal carer in London, who had worked as a full-time nurse in a public hospital in Hong Kong, came to the UK as a working holiday maker. She said,

I think judging from my income in Hong Kong, I should be considered as a middle-class. Now in the UK, I think I belong to the lower-class because my salary is very low. If I take more shifts, I could earn more...but now I only work four days a week, 12 hours a day. After paying tax, there is nothing much left.

Karmen chose to suspend her earning power and career prospects in Hong Kong to pursue a romantic opportunity and a better work-life balance in the UK. Her long-term goal, however, was to become a registered nurse in the UK. When she did not work, she was preparing her registration application, including passing the English language exam. In her view, being a registered nurse in the UK would mean a significant drop in her income from HKD\$40,000 per month (HKD\$480,000 or £50,000 per year) in Hong Kong to £23,000 per year (Groome 2017) in the UK before tax. But it would also be the first step towards gaining British citizenship.

Suspension - intentionally suspending, or putting on hold, some aspects of life in order to maximise others - is a work-life strategy that many migrants use.

Suspension shifts migrants' life focus from the present to the imagined future; this process is driven by migrants' aspirations, desires, and capacities. Suspension of class-related privileges and a sense of insecurity about class depreciation often goes hand in hand. This is reflected in the case of Lin Lin, a 28-year-old migrant who completed her master's degree and switched onto a Tier 4 Dependant visa. In her case, she had suspended her socio-economic mobility and potential earning power in China in order to accompany her husband to finish his PhD in the UK. She said, "I was middle-class in China. But I have become *wu chan*<sup>15</sup> in the UK. I don't have a property here. I don't have a stable job here."

## CONCLUSION: TEMPORALITIES OF MIGRATION AND THE TEMPORALITY OF CLASS

As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, Wright and Shin (1988, 9-10) argue that class has a temporal nature. This is because people often make sense of their current socio-economic situation and justify their social position by comparing their present economic position with their past lives. Class identity is a narrative (Giddens 1991) rather than a fixed destination.

For temporary migrants, class identity is complex and entangled with their identity as a migrant. As Savage (2000, 150) argues, we should "see class cultures as contingently embodying forms of individualised identities which operate relationally". In this chapter, I have discussed the social meanings of class in contemporary China, Hong Kong, and Britain. As demonstrated by data from my interviews with mainland Chinese and Hong Kong migrants, class representation from a political and sociological perspective does not necessarily match with individuals' own perception of their class status, which also changes over time during their migration trajectories in the UK.

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<sup>15</sup> "*Wu chan*" is a short form of "*wu chan jie ji*", meaning proletariat in Marx's class theory. Lin Lin's use of "*wu chan*" has a simpler meaning: "*wu*" means "lacking" and "*chan*" means property. Rather than describing herself as a proletariat according to Marx's understanding, Lin Lin was saying that she had no property in the UK.

Migration and new cultural encounters may challenge Chinese migrants' knowledge and ideas about class, especially after a period of stay in the UK. Migrants are aware that the British class system works differently, and that their Chinese or Hong Kong class status loses its former meaning in the new cultural and social context. This chapter shows that Chinese migrants' understanding of their own class status, of what class is, and how it works in general, are sometimes upset by their encounters with British society. The movement of people and border regulations contribute to different forms of social inequality. For example, migrant workers, including those who are well-educated and skilled, are prone to vulnerability as they are often subjected to differential treatment in the labour market (see chapter 3) and the time-related visa restrictions of the destination country (see chapters 3 and 5).

Although the majority of informants saw themselves as "in the middle" of the social spectrum in their place of origin, some felt that they had experienced a degradation of their class status after migrating to the UK (for example, see Lin Lin's comment about becoming "*wu chan*" (proletariat/lack of property). Other self-perceived middle-class informants, however, thought that they still retained their middling position after migration; or if their class status had changed, it would only be temporary. In other cases, marriage migrants justified their class identity by referring to class position of their spouses in the UK. All of these examples demonstrate that the temporality of class and the temporalities of migration work simultaneously to shape temporary migrants' class identity. They also highlight the agency of Chinese temporary migrants in constantly seeking ways to make sense of their class and migrant identities in the UK.



## CHAPTER 3

### OBSTACLES TO CAPITAL ACCUMULATION AND CONVERSION: DIFFERENTIAL INCLUSION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Existing studies of Chinese international student migration have applied Bourdieu's theoretical tools to class analysis. For examples, Waters (2006) and Xiang and Shen (2009) all analyse how middle-class children acquire cultural capital through overseas education and the role of capital convertibility in class consolidation processes. Among these studies, cultural capital acquired overseas is often seen as useful to increase middle-class children's employability and maintain their status as they return home. Other studies look at the problems of capital devaluation and deskilling faced by ethnically Chinese skilled migrants or student migrants who move to western countries and stay overseas successfully (Ho 2013; Man 2004). However, little is known about the obstacles to the processes of capital accumulation and conversion of young Chinese middle-class migrants who struggle to remain overseas, and which types and subtypes of capital are being used in attempts to achieve transnational goals and consolidate a middle-class identity that would be recognised both in their home countries and the UK. I argue that it is useful to use the term "capital" to define and analyse the resources discussed in this chapter. This is because Bourdieu's interpretation of the four different forms of capital, i.e. economic (income and wealth), cultural capital (education, language and taste), social capital (social network and connection), and symbolic capital (objects that are related to one's status) is a framework that allows us to identify middle-class membership.

The concept of capital conversion derives from Bourdieu's influential argument that in modern society, income and wealth alone are not enough to determine class identity and membership. Bourdieu pays extra attention to cultural capital because it can generate the other three forms of capital, and thus is regarded as the key to securing middle-class reproduction. For example, Bourdieu (1986: 245) describes how in class-divided societies, "possessors of large cultural capital" are able also to secure material and symbolic profits, whereas those who are from poor families and

do not have the economic and cultural means to continue education, but only to maintain the minimum necessities of their lives, cannot do so.

Bourdieu (1986) describes three features of “capital”: (1) capital takes time to accumulate; (2) the value of capital is determined by its convertibility; and (3) the conversion processes of different types and subtypes of capital are subjected to sets of constraints of the social world. These features are precisely the reasons why Chinese migrants who consider themselves middle class in China or Hong Kong may not be able to identify themselves as having the same status in the UK (see chapter 2), due to the lack of time to accumulate capital in the UK and the difficulty to convert their own nationally and culturally bounded capital.

Inspired by the work of Plüss (2013) on migrants’ capital conversion abilities, I will examine the processes through which Chinese migrants are able to effect conversions between different forms of capital, such as economic, cultural and social capital. In this chapter, I will also identify several subtypes of capital that are specific to, and help illuminate, migrant experience, e.g. temporal capital, family capital and intimate relationship capital. I will show how these types and subtypes of capital are related and distinct. In other words, I hope to contribute new elements to the analysis of capital conversion.

## THE CONVERSIONS OF ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND TEMPORAL CAPITAL

In chapter 1, I discussed the efforts of Chinese middle-class families to help their children to accumulate institutionalised cultural capital, especially in the form of a foreign degree. Student migrants (and their family) actively transform economic capital into cultural capital. According to the website TopUniversities, which specialises in offering advice to students who intend to pursue a global career and higher education, undergraduate tuition fees for international students in the UK currently start at around £10,000 annually, rising to £35,000 or more. At the postgraduate level, yearly tuition fees for taught degrees varied between £9,700 and £32,000 in 2016/17 (Playdon 2018). In addition to tuition fees, each international

student in the UK is expected to have a living allowance of at least £1,015 a month (Home Office 2019a). Even though informants did not normally equate spending such large sums with *buying* a foreign degree, many held the view that without the money required to buy time and temporary residency rights in the UK, they could not have made it overseas. In this sense, time is a form of capital that can be converted from economic capital.

The UK employs a points-based immigration system to regulate the number, composition, and qualities of migrants from non-EEA countries. Most temporary migrants are subjected to what I call “state-controlled time” (see chapter 5), which refers to the lengths of time that migrants are allowed to live in the destination country. Temporary migrants in the UK are also allowed to count time spent in the country towards the five-year and/or ten-year permanent residency paths. If a temporary resident manages to live in the UK with a valid visa for long enough, he or she will earn the ticket to permanent residency or probationary citizenship and become a “to-be-citizen” (Kostakopoulous 2010; Van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel 2011; Soysal 2012). Probationary citizenship is a reward for committed migrants as it frees them from visa restrictions, but such a reward can be taken away if they no longer fulfil the requirements set by Home Office, for example if they leave the UK for more than two years.

As I have stated elsewhere in this thesis, not all of the temporary migrants that I interviewed hoped to stay in the UK permanently or to obtain British citizenship. However, migrants’ wish to prolong their stays meant that they had to navigate their personal and professional lives within the visa system whilst living in the UK. For those who had already obtained a British degree and had no intention to continue studying, the routes to achieve extended residency were limited to employment, investment, and marriage.

Most informants attempted to or at least considered converting their institutionalised cultural capital back into economic capital and visa-time capital by securing visa-sponsored employment. However, restrictive immigration policy, the temporalities of migration, and differential inclusion in the labour market made staying on in the UK through visa-sponsored employment a difficult goal to attain. The pathway to settlement through skilled work has been, for many years, narrowing. In 2012, the

then-Home Secretary Theresa May cancelled the Post-Study Work (PSW) visa, which took away non-EEA students' right to spend two years in the UK after graduation. In September 2019, the Home Office announced new proposals, one of which is to re-introduce the 2-year Post-Study Work visa for non-EEA students starting courses from 2021. This proposal was criticised by the right-wing campaign group Migration Watch as a "retrograde step" (BBC News 2019).

Under the current visa regulations, students have a maximum of four months to look for graduate-level and visa-sponsored jobs. They will usually need to meet certain financial requirements to acquire a Tier 2 (General Work) visa: a minimum salary of £30,000 per year or earning the "appropriate rate" for the job that they are offered. In this thesis, Tier 2 visa is an abbreviation for Tier 2 (General Work) visa, unless specify otherwise. This visa is issued for workers who have a skilled job offer and a certificate of sponsorship from a UK employer (Home Office 2019b). However, during my data collection between 2016 and 2017, the minimum financial requirement for the Tier 2 visa was lower. At that time, my informants would have to earn a minimum salary of £20,800 per year for the visa; and a minimum of £35,000 or more per year in order to acquire UK indefinite leave to remain after holding a Tier 2 visa for five years. As for working holiday makers from Hong Kong who, unlike their mainland Chinese counterparts, were able to work in the UK through participation in the Youth Mobility Scheme (YMS), their two-year visa could not be renewed. Therefore, they too would have to look for visa-sponsored employment or explore other avenues during this fixed time period, if they wished to stay on in the UK. During the research interviews, my informants often criticised the Home Office, and expressed their view that these measures were constructed to impose barriers for migrants like them who hoped to establish themselves in the UK.

Previous studies have suggested that Chinese well-educated migrants in developed western countries often experience deskilling, depreciation of cultural capital, and immediate downward mobility due to a sudden change of habitus (see Fong 2011; Ho 2013; Man 2004). As argued by Friedmann (2002: 302), habitus, which can be understood as an environment in which social norms and tendencies are shaped by individuals over time, is place-contingent. As such, the occupational habitus of migrants' place of origin often creates tension when exercised in a different socio-economic context. However, individuals may "continue to judge their circumstances

according to the “rules” of their place of origin” (Kelly and Lusi 2006: 837).

Changing of habitus remains a discomfiting process when people find themselves confined in an environment where former achievements and resources are rendered irrelevant (Oliver and O’Reilly 2010: 14).

This echoes my informants’ experiences in the UK. For those who obtained educational qualifications from their country of origin, their credentials were not always transferrable; and cultural capital was not an item in a “rucksack” that could be carried across borders freely (Erel 2010). Many felt their skills and qualifications were underrated, their job choices were limited, and their salaries were lower than they had expected.

Analysing migrants’ narratives of impediment reveals how the neoliberal assumption that geographical and social mobility are improved through an accumulation of economic and educational capital is not borne out in practice. The social sciences literature provides ample examples of this: over-qualified Filipino domestic helpers in First World countries (Constable 2003; Lan 2006; Parreñas 2001), degree holders from the EU taking up unskilled jobs in the UK (Jordan and Brown 2007), and highly educated migrants failing to get into sectors classified as “highly-skilled” in destination countries (Kofman and Raghuram 2005).

Also, education migration does not bring equal employment opportunities and life chances to those who move. Depending on the popularity of the degree that migrants pursue, their job prospects, income level, and chances of staying on in the UK vary. In general, my informants perceived degrees in the arts, humanities and social sciences as less financially rewarding than degrees in finance, business, and management.

My informants regarded a British university education as more valuable than a degree obtained in mainland China or Hong Kong in terms of conversion into economic and social capital in their home country, where a British degree is considered relatively prestigious by employers. For instance, Alice was a PhD graduate in Linguistics, who had been looking for academic jobs in the UK for months. She considered her qualification to be the most valuable in securing a lectureship at a university in China, but not in the UK. Overseas education does not only enable student returnees to accumulate and convert international social assets

on a larger scale, but also “lifts people to a higher scale of capital conversion” (Xiang and Shen 2009). This is in contrast to graduates who hope to stay on in the UK, where a British university education is seen as more of a norm, and is often a prerequisite to be considered for employment.

#### LACKING EMBODIED CULTURAL CAPITAL

My informants understood that although they were able to acquire institutionalised cultural capital from British universities within a few years, cultural knowledge about British social practices, fluency in English, and advancement in communication skills were harder to achieve. As temporary migrants, they lacked embodied cultural capital, which according to Bourdieu (1986), refers to an individual’s incorporation of cultural attitudes, norms, and practices that are inherited over time, primarily through the socialisation process within a family unit, to propel them forward or fast-track their career in the UK.

Researchers argue that English language and communication skills are a form of embodied cultural capital that facilitates better job prospects, social interaction, and cultural integration for migrants moving to western developed countries (for example, Dustmann 1999; Thondhlana, Madziva and McGrath 2016). Although English education is widely incorporated in primary and secondary school curriculums in mainland China and Hong Kong, many informants commented that their teachers mainly focused on training their reading and writing skills, and memorisation of grammar and vocabulary, but not so much on their speaking and listening skills. After arriving the UK, many migrants had difficulties in understanding certain British accents and expressing themselves in English. But most agreed that their communication skills had improved after living in the UK for a period of time. Gradually, most migrants were able to make friends with non-Chinese people but very few had close British friends. For example, Sally, a 30-year-old spouse visa holder said,

It has taken me some time to get used to the way British people talk and socialise here. The trouble is sometimes I may offend someone, but I wouldn’t know. This is something that no one would teach you. British people are quite polite, shy and not straightforward. You can only learn

about what you should say and what you can't say by living here for a long time.

Another informant, Cathy, a PhD holder and lecturer at a university in London, also admitted that incompetence in spoken English and a lack of communication skills were problems which made her feel that she was unable to earn respect from her colleagues and students. She said,

My difficulty is that even though I've obtained a PhD degree in the UK, my English is not as good as the natives. When you give a lecture to students, you can't make jokes that they can understand. You have no idea what students like and dislike...when students don't like you, they can cause you a lot of trouble.

In fact, language skills capital and cultural knowledge capital often go hand in hand. When migrants felt that their English was not "good enough", they usually also described an inability to adapt to British culture and frustration in their daily lives. Cathy continued,

When I first started to work here, I was not familiar with the western teaching style. On my first day of work, I was told to sit in a course and to observe how the course was run. I was told that I would take over the course 3 to 4 weeks later. When I went into the classroom, there was a middle-aged English guy there, I assumed he was the course tutor. He then started to take attendance. After that, he looked at me, and all the students looked at me. Then he said, "she may look like a student, but she is not. She will take over my course, not as a student, but as a teacher!". This was the first day of my job. Can you imagine how I felt? I think there is a gender issue too. If it was my boyfriend who sat there - my boyfriend is 190cm tall by the way - I think the guy wouldn't introduce him like this...In China, people generally respect teachers. Even though you are a woman, and you are young, your identity as a teacher automatically gives you respect. Chinese students don't care too much about your experience and gender, they obey you as long as you occupy a higher social hierarchy. Maybe because I am Chinese, I see hierarchy in the work environment as very important. The guy who introduced me to the class was actually a Research Fellow, his job rank was below mine... Sometimes I feel really bad because it seems like everyone seems to think it is okay to give me advice, regardless of who they are and whether it is appropriate. Sometimes I don't even agree with the advice that I am given.

For new migrants, an improvement in English communication skills and an accumulation of embodied cultural capital in the British social context are essential for building a career in the UK, which often takes time. Depending on migrants' own personality and social networks, their experiences of interactions with local people

vary. In Sally's case, she stressed an observational learning approach in which direct teaching and instruction from her network was minimal. In Cathy's case, although she received help and advice in her workplace, her own understanding of the importance of hierarchy in Chinese culture shaped the way she interacted with her colleagues and students, and her expectations from these interactions.

Many migrants were aware of how unfamiliarity with cultural practices and social norms hinders the establishment of useful social networks that could shape career trajectories.

For example, Li Ming, an auditor at a Scottish bank, aspired for career advancement to the managerial level. She said,

When you become a manager, your role is to establish relationships with people above you and below you. But because I come from a different cultural background, I think it would be hard to do networking with people whose positions are above me. Of course, it is true that if you have a good personality or if you have good relationships with your colleagues, you will have more opportunities. After all, people always have preferences. If people like you, you will have more opportunities. It is very normal. This is also why some older colleagues of mine decided to return to Asia when they had reached a stage where they could no longer progress further in their career because they felt that there was no support available.

Migrants rely on the knowledge they acquired before migration to make sense of their new cultural experiences. These experiences in turn shape their identities. One of the topics that was frequently brought up by informants themselves was the adoption of an English name, which some believed to be a form of capital that would help them secure jobs in the UK. These informants felt that using a Chinese name in job applications and interviews could hinder their chances of being hired. Qing, a master's degree holder who was unemployed at the time of interview, said,

When I would apply for jobs and get rejected, I would get upset. I would think that my CV is not good enough or my English is not good enough. But my (Hong Kong) husband would say to me that I got rejected because I don't have an English name.

According to researchers at Nuffield College's Centre for Social Investigation (CSI), compared to white British citizens, ethnic minority groups in the UK have to send, on average, 60% more job applications to get a positive response from prospective employers. Their finding is based on an experiment they conducted between



November 2016 and December 2017, where they sent nearly 3,200 real job applications in response to adverts on a recruitment site, randomly varying applicants' minority background by changing their name, but holding their skills, qualifications, and work experience constant (Centre for Social Investigation 2019). The findings of this and other previous studies, such as a field experiment conducted for the Department for Work and Pensions in 2009, have revealed significant discrimination against job applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds (Wood et al. 2009).

Most Hong Kong informants had a Chinese and an English name, and preferred to be called by their English name during interviews. These informants adopted the English name, and sometimes changed it more than once, when they were in secondary school and even primary school, often as requested by their English teachers. Mainland Chinese informants were less likely to have an English name before migration. Both mainland Chinese and Hong Kong informants often adopted names that may be considered unconventional, inappropriate or arbitrary by local British people, such as Coco, Suki and Rainbow (for sociolinguistic analyses of the English first name culture in Hong Kong and among overseas Chinese, see Diao 2014; Gao 2011; Li 1997; Tan 2001, respectively). Less conventional names like these undoubtedly mark young Chinese people out from the crowd and express their individuality, but these names may lose their values as they are carried across geographical and cultural borders.

Even though Qing agreed with her husband that adopting an English name could increase her employability, she was still reluctant to do so. Qing continued,

I really don't want to have an English name. I am quite stubborn to think that there is nothing wrong with my name. Why do I need an English name just to make others' life easier?

Qing felt that holding onto her Chinese name was a major way to hold onto her Chinese identity and, in her words, her "true self". However, when Qing failed to secure a job continuously for 6 months, she started to feel underappreciated by British employers, and was forced to apply for jobs that targeted Chinese people or required Chinese language skills, confining her to an ethnic niche (see Pang and Lau 1998; Mok and Platt 2018).

Even with a “proper” English name, new migrants still need to acquire knowledge of recruitment practices and processes in order to secure good job opportunities. For example, as a working holiday maker, 23-year-old Owen hoped to find a sales job in the fashion industry in the UK. One of his friends in Hong Kong recommended that he hand in his CV to shops in person, based on his own successful experiences. Despite walking into 30 shops along Oxford Street in London, Owen did not get any interviews or job offers. As a new migrant with no social networks in London, Owen did not realise that even in the fashion retail industry, most job applications are processed online in the UK. In the end, he was hired as a salesperson at a small boutique in his local area, earning an hourly rate of £3.50, which was much lower than the minimum wage set by the government. If he had known about the national minimum wage, workers’ rights, and the channels to make a complaint, he would have had a lower chance of being exploited.

#### EMPLOYERS’ PREFERENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

The majority of informants said they did not have personal experience of “serious discrimination” in the UK but felt that “mild” racial and gender discrimination are not uncommon. Cher, a 27-year-old Tier 2 (Dependant) visa holder perceived racial discrimination as a major factor undermining her employment opportunities. She recalled a job interview in which she and another, white local, woman were the remaining candidates for one job. She said,

I felt like we both had similar qualifications and experiences, but in the end, I think I didn’t get the job because I am Chinese.

However, not all informants considered their ethnicity as a disadvantage in the British labour market. Some, like PhD student Fangfei, anticipated that job opportunities for Chinese in the UK would increase after Brexit due to the close economic co-operation and strong diplomatic relationship between the UK and China. She was more concerned about gender discrimination in British academia than about racial discrimination. She said,

I believe race is not the biggest issue. Chinese PhD graduates from British universities can get into academia in the UK. But I heard from a senior

student in my department whose job application as a university lecturer got rejected, and she told me that the interviewer actually said to her that they prefer hiring men...gender discrimination definitely exists.

Some Chinese women that I interviewed saw their ethnic and gender identities as double disadvantages in their industries. For instance, Ying Men was a Chinese language teacher at a private primary school in London in her early thirties. After graduating from university, Ying Men worked as a teacher in various countries, including China, Singapore, and the UK. She had 8 years' work experience and was hoping to acquire a managerial role in the school where she was currently teaching in the near future. But she also pointed out,

Most managerial roles in schools are dominated by middle-aged white men. I guess this is quite common. But I am a high achiever. I know that if I returned to China, there wouldn't be too many obstacles that would stop me from getting managerial roles, but here in the UK, it is not that easy. I feel that this is not because I am incapable, but because the structure here prevents me from getting what I want.

However, some informants held an opposite view. David was a research fellow at a university in London who drew on the fact that his deputy director was a Chinese woman to support his argument that perceived discrimination may be a problem of self-projection and imagination. He emphasised, "No one knows whether it [discrimination] exists or not". In a separate example, Georgia shared a story about her Japanese friend who used to work in a law firm in London that was largely dominated by white British men. Through this story, she argued that self-perceived discrimination contributes to feelings of insecurity and inferiority, which may also provide an excuse for migrants to victimise themselves. She said,

My friend was very excited when she accepted the job offer and heard that she was the first East Asian to work there [the law firm]. But I remember every time we met up, she complained about how unhappy she was...she said she got discriminated against by local British at the firm. I couldn't believe it. I knew that from my experience of working in university, sometimes there would be local people who talk amongst themselves and pretend not to see you. But I don't think it counts as a form of discrimination. It is a differential treatment I suppose. My friend said people at her firm would actually give her a certain look. They gave her lots of work to do. When everyone had gone home, she was the only one staying behind. She passed her probation after working there for one or two months, and her company actually was willing to apply for a work visa for her to stay in the UK, which was something that the company had never done before. In the end, she chose to return to Japan because she said

she couldn't go on anymore. I am still in touch with her. Recently she told me that in her new job, she has to finish work at five in the morning and go to work at 8am again...I asked whether she regretted giving up the job in London, she said [she regretted it] a bit. I now see things differently...I won't easily jump to the conclusion that something happens to me because of discrimination. I would think of other explanations before drawing that conclusion. If I am always too sensitive about how people treat me, I will always feel inferior. Once you think racial discrimination is the cause of everything you face, then you will feel like there is no way you can make a change because you simply can't change who you are and how you look. But if you try to make sense of what happens to you from a different perspective, you will become positive and try to improve yourself.

#### LIMITED TEMPORAL CAPITAL AND UNDESIRABLE TEMPORARY RESIDENCY STATUS

Time is a form of capital that determines how likely it is that a temporary migrant will be able to stay on in the UK; in general, the longer the time a migrant has on his or her visa, the better his or her chance of getting a job. How much temporal capital a migrant acquires is determined by the type of visa he/she holds, which is related to how much economic and cultural capital he/she owns and his/her family resources in their country of origin. Migrants' temporal capital in the UK cannot be accumulated beyond the appropriating capacities of an individual agent. For instance, while middle-class families in mainland China and Hong Kong can afford to sponsor their children's education in the UK, which also gives them an opportunity to live there temporarily, families of lower-class background are not able to do so. And in spite of the initial success of young middle-class migrants' conversion from economic capital to cultural and temporal capital, in order to continue their accumulation of temporal capital and stay living on in the UK, most migrants will have to switch onto a skilled work visa.

Job hunting takes time. According to my informants, the application process for visa-sponsored jobs is comparatively more complicated, and often takes longer to complete, than for other jobs that do not require a visa. For the Chinese temporary migrants that I interviewed, the timing of their search for, and even departure from a job, is important, and requires them to conduct careful planning and calculation. For

example, during our first interview in March 2016, Vivian, a working holiday maker from Hong Kong who had been working in a low-paid event promotion job for over six months, struggled to make a decision about whether to stay in her job. She said,

If I want to stay in the UK by getting a Tier 2 visa, I might as well leave this job now and find a visa-sponsored job straight away. Otherwise, my chance of being hired by a company that sponsors me with a work visa will only get lower and lower as time passes. By the time I have less than a year on my visa, I would only be able to find temporary or short-term contract jobs, and there is no way I would get visa sponsorship from these jobs. But I don't know if I should leave my job now because even though it doesn't sponsor me with a visa and the salary is quite low, it is still better than nothing.

In a separate example, Qi was a 25-year-old Chinese national, who first came to the UK for a master's degree in international relations and politics in 2013. Two months after she arrived, she started to prepare her CV for job applications in the hope of remaining in the UK after graduation. Despite her best efforts, she was not able to stay. However, she was offered a job by a British company that required her to work in Hong Kong straight away. In the end, she accepted the offer and moved to Hong Kong for one and a half years until being transferred back to London in the summer 2016 with a Tier 2 (Intra-company Transfer) visa. She recalled how difficult it was to find jobs after graduation in London two years ago. She said,

Although I had started to look for jobs pretty much as soon as I arrived, in the end, I only had 4 months to do it intensively due to my busy course work... You know, if you want to obtain a Tier 2 visa, you need to start preparing your CV and job applications long before your course finishes. I spent a lot of time preparing. I even did an internship just so that I could put it in my CV! But it didn't work.

For most informants, finding the first job in the UK, including temporary, permanent, part-time, full-time and even freelance jobs, was the most difficult and time-consuming. Although migrants' chances of being invited to a job interview and becoming employed were generally improved after securing the first job, by the time they accumulated some work experience and wanted to find a job that would actually give them a work visa, they had little time left in the UK before they had to leave.

The actual duration of temporary migrants' mobilities is determined by the temporal limitations placed upon their visas. Many working holiday informants also explained to me that they were likely to be perceived as "uncommitted staff" due to their

temporary residency status in the UK; such status entails considerable risks, uncertainties, and extra costs in the eyes of prospective employers, who may be concerned about their employees having to leave the country after receiving full training.

Theoretically, if a migrant is skilled and/or equipped with adequate educational qualifications or extensive work experience, especially in visa-sponsored industries such as finance, business, accounting, information technology, tertiary education, engineering and nursing, it should not matter to employers how much time the prospective employee has in the UK before his or her visa expires at the time of lodging a job application. However, interviews with Chinese migrants suggest otherwise. For example, Yi Fung, a Chinese national in his late twenties and a master's degree holder from a British university, was a Tier 4 (Dependant) visa holder whose residency status was tied to his wife, who was a master's student. After only one-and-a-half years in London, Yi Fung failed to secure a visa-sponsored job in the IT industry, despite his qualifications and work experience. In contrast, another informant who acquired a Tier 4 (Dependant) visa due to his wife's doctoral study in the UK, had a four-year window of time in the UK. This allowed him to work in three different IT jobs and accumulate work experience before he was employed by his current company in London, which offered him a Tier 2 work visa at the outset when the contract was signed.

Temporal capital is arguably even more crucial for those who hope to remain in the UK through the employment path, but who do not consider themselves as having the skills or qualifications required to meet the demands of major visa-sponsored industries in the UK. Although most informants had found jobs that they were qualified to apply for, many of these jobs could not sponsor a work visa. Feeling frustrated, Lin Lin said,

If you go to any recruitment website and find a job advertisement, the first question they ask before you can fill in an application form is "do you need a visa to work in the UK?". If you tick "yes", you will find "thank you for your interest but you cannot proceed further" on the next page. Higher education means nothing if you don't have the right residency status here.

Another informant, Vivian, was in a similar situation. During our second interview in September 2016, she described herself as being stuck in what could be called an

“immobile employment situation”. Vivian obtained a degree in Japanese studies from a university in Hong Kong and accumulated four years of work experience in prestigious Japanese companies before moving to the UK. Despite her credentials, however, she failed to find any visa-sponsored jobs. She did receive initial interest from a few Japanese companies in London, but these employers had a policy of hiring only migrants who did not require visas, or British citizens. She said,

There was a time when I felt so desperate that I was willing to take any job – just any job as long as I could stay in the country for five years to get permanent residency. I imagine that once I have gained this right, I will have more freedom to choose what I want to do, and I could find a permanent job with Japanese companies here. And by that time, they wouldn't reject me simply because of my residency status. But how can I get there in the first place?

For these informants, their chances of being hired by a company who would sponsor their visa were limited, and rested not only on being offered a job in the first place but also on their professional performance during a probationary period. Since companies offering visa-sponsored employment can sponsor any employee at any time they wish, some would consider granting a visa to a non-European Economic Area (EEA) migrant only after having his/her performance assessed. As such, Chinese employees must ensure that they leave an adequate amount of time for British employers to conduct job evaluation, and to apply for a Tier 2 visa from the Home Office.

Maggie, now a human resources officer at a Chinese trading company in London, succeeded in switching from a student visa to a work visa in the later stage of her employment. Maggie obtained two master's degrees in the UK. She first started to look for jobs when she was studying for her second master's degree. Soon she was hired by her current company for her proficiency in Chinese and English. When her contract was about to end, she was offered a Tier 5 (Temporary Worker) visa<sup>16</sup> by the company. Knowing that this Tier 5 visa could not be directly switched to a Tier 2 visa that leads to permanent residence, Maggie boldly asked if she could be sponsored on a Tier 2 visa instead. At the time, the company was in the process of applying for a Tier 2 visa sponsorship licence from the Home Office. Since Maggie

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<sup>16</sup> A Tier 5 (Temporary Worker) visa is issued for workers who have a certificate of sponsorship from a UK employer/organisation/charity with a valid Tier 5 sponsorship licence (Home Office and UK Visas and Immigration 2019).

had left enough time for job hunting and encountered a good job opportunity quite early on, she was able to work for a few months before her student visa expired. She was later among the first employees in her company who received a Tier 2 visa.

As an HR officer, Maggie's job was to interview job candidates, process job applications, and conduct Tier 2 visa administrative work for non-EEA employees, a large part of which was to deal with the Home Office. Here she explained from an employer's perspective why temporary migrants having a longer time in the UK would be in a more advantageous position in recruitment. She also criticised the current visa system, which in her view, had imposed high financial and temporal costs on British employers who wished to hire non-EEA migrants. She said,

This year our company experienced some tough times. We had an employee who wanted to change from a Tier 4 student visa to a Tier 2 work visa. It used to be easy. In previous years, we usually waited for a few days to receive the visa from the Home Office. This year the Home Office told us that it would take around 4 months to get the visa. But this employee's student visa was expiring. We hired a solicitor, who told us that there is a new way to get Tier 2 visas more quickly. Basically, there are 20 quotas released from the Home Office every day. We have to call them every morning and see if we can get the visa on a first-come first-served basis. This time we were lucky and were able to get it for our employee. It happened before that the work visa was released too late and the prospective employee had already left the UK, and did not return to take up the job. I imagine this was because he had found a better job after resettling in China... Sometimes even after you submit all the supporting documents to the Home Office, you still need to wait for a long time to get the visa. You know, people who work at the Home Office can easily give you the visa within a day. Very often, they have reviewed all the documents, but they just put them aside just to delay the process. This is one of their ways to discourage companies from hiring people from outside of the EU. Also, British employers who wish to hire a non-EU migrant have to complete a Resident Labour Market Test and advertise the job to local people for 28 days. And only after that, they can offer the job to a non-EU migrant. But this requirement is meaningless and only adds administrative burden to companies like us. This is because many companies actually have already hired someone, or had potential employees in mind before they even "advertise" the jobs. The government forces us to meet this requirement just to show that they have done something to protect local interests. But what's the point?

Maggie further pointed out that although the Resident Labour Market Test is designed as a requirement for companies to prove that no native or resident of the



UK is available for the job by advertising it in specific ways before giving it to non-EEA migrants (Workpermit 2017), it has become merely a part of standard recruitment procedures that come after the interview and candidate selection processes. The 28 days requirement also becomes a period of waiting time for both visa-sponsored companies and employees themselves before they can start the visa application process.

## LIMITED AND WEAKENED SOCIAL CAPITAL

In Bourdieu's pioneering work, social capital is defined as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (1986: 248). This definition highlights the importance of the relationship between group membership and the resources accessible.

Within migration studies, the notion of social capital has been widely deployed to explain the significant role that kinship and friendship networks play in facilitating migratory processes. New migrants often move to destinations where there are established kinship networks or ethnic communities, which facilitate their integration into the destination country (Portes 2000).

Compared to the early Chinese migrants who were often uneducated male peasants, and managed to emigrate using networks of family, friends and neighbours to find unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in the UK in the 1970s (Watson 1975), permanent migration to the UK is arguably more difficult for today's migrants who are subjected to stricter immigration rules, especially those who only have limited social networks in the UK. None of my informants had adequate social capital, that is, an immediate family member in the UK who could help them to achieve family reunification immigration. While they had made friends and colleagues in the UK, these social networks were rarely used to facilitate an extended stay, remigration, or permanent immigration. One exception was Wallace,

a student informant who tried to switch to a Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) visa<sup>17</sup> by collaborating on a business plan with his university friend whom he met in the UK.

Chinese migrants in this study hoped to expand their social networks in the UK. However, they were also aware that the longer they stayed living in the UK, the more devaluated their pre-migration capital would be. Many described their frustration at not being able to further expand or maintain their social networks in their country of origin, and how their original networks were weakened over time. Hite (2005) observes that “hollow” embedding happens when migrants’ former friendship networks “move on”, and migrants can no longer find their place among them. This phenomenon does not only relate to migrants’ relational ties and sense of belonging, but also has implications for their ability to make use of *guanxi*<sup>18</sup>, which can be translated as a personal connection, relationship, or network in Chinese social contexts, for pragmatic reasons, such as in career development.

While new arrivals were generally positive about their ability to secure career opportunities in China or Hong Kong when they eventually returned, people who had lived abroad for a longer period of time, for example over a decade, were more

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<sup>17</sup> The Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) visa has now been cancelled. It was issued to eligible applicants from outside the EEA and Switzerland who were awarded a UK-recognised bachelor’s degree, master’s degree or PhD before the date of endorsement, for having a genuine and credible business idea.

<sup>18</sup> *Guanxi* is probably one of the most researched Chinese concepts in recent decades. Translated as “interdependent relationship” by Qi (2013), *guanxi* is highly embedded in every aspect of Chinese social life, especially in the context of discussions of relations between individuals in friendship and political or economic relationships. As Qi (2013: 309) states, the term *quanxi* indicates “carefully constructed and maintained relations between persons which carry mutual obligations and benefits. The term receives enormous attention from international media and western researchers, reflecting their strong interest in how *guanxi* facilitates business in or with China following the rise of China since the 1980s. For instance, Hope, from the BBC news (2014), reported “The mystery of China’s *guanxi*”, describing it a “crucial part of doing business in China”. But *guanxi* is not confined to business relations; it is a concept that is fundamental to the understanding of Chinese social structure. It is claimed that in China, “from birth to death, almost everything in one’s life needs *guanxi*” (Ruan 2017, 1). Having good *guanxi* enables ones to give birth in a hospital with good service and facilities; to enroll into a better school; to get a good job after graduation; and to arrange a better funeral service for loved ones (Yang 1994; Gold, Guthrie, and Wank 2002). Qi (2013) argues that *guanxi* is not itself a cause of corruption, but one of the mechanisms. *Guanxi* is a social mechanism to gain and maintain trust and provide transaction cost advantages. *Guanxi* or similar relations are “universally practiced as informal facilitations of the formal processes” in politics and business everywhere (Qi 2013: 313).

sceptical of their career prospects back home. Ryan (2018) examines how migrants' extended temporariness puts them in "place-specific opportunity structures": as they gradually embed in a new labour market, they are at the same time dis-embedding from the labour market of their country of origin. Some informants were also concerned that the longer they stayed abroad, the more unfamiliar they would be with the work atmosphere and recruitment procedures in China or Hong Kong, and the more difficult it would become to bring acquired cultural capital back home (see also Ryan and Mulholland 2014).

## FAMILY CAPITAL

Although migrants' social capital in the UK was initially limited, and their friendship networks "back home" were often weakened over time, there are two subtypes of social capital, i.e. family capital and intimate relationship capital that are particularly prominent for Chinese migrants' migration and life-course trajectories in the UK. I define family capital as financial resources, emotional support and physical help, especially in the form of childcare, provided by migrants' families in China or Hong Kong. The term "family capital" emphasises the role that Chinese parents play in helping their migrant children to settle in the UK and maintain middle-class lifestyles.

Most informants said they returned to China or Hong Kong at least once a year to visit their family. Both migrant sons and daughters claimed that they maintained a close relationship with their family in their home countries out of choice and duty, yet I noticed that it was usually migrant daughters, but not sons, who maintained daily contact. Migrant daughters who were married to someone in the UK, especially those who were in a dual-income marriage, saw family capital in the forms of financial subsidy and childcare, as an even more important resource.

Migrant women in this study tended to ask their own mothers, instead of their mothers-in-law, to get involved in child rearing. In some cases, migrants' mothers would stay in the UK for a maximum of 6 months per year (due to visa restrictions), to provide care for their daughter and their grandchildren. Informants appreciated the free labour provided by their own mother, whose help has aided them to save on nursery spending and eased the double burden on them to juggle demands in domestic and public spheres. As Xiao En, a PhD student and a mother of a 2-year-

old said, “The most difficult time for us was when my husband and I were both sick, but we didn’t have any family or relatives here to help out with the kid. That was the time that I really wished my mum could live in the UK to help us.” It is also important to note that not all migrant daughters expected childcare assistance from their own parents. Some migrants had never considered asking their parents for help because of the generational differences in beliefs and values about early education and child development.

Most migrants agreed that parental support in the form of financial assistance was crucial for them to become successful and have a relatively comfortable life in the UK. As young migrants who were just starting their career, many of them continued to receive financial help from their Chinese parents after graduating, at least for a period of time. As stated previously, only around 25% of my informants earned an income that they felt they could live comfortably on. A majority of my informants relied heavily on the resources provided by their families in China or Hong Kong in order to support their overseas living expenses and maintain middle-class lifestyles. In addition, migrant daughters’ family capital, especially in the form of financial assistance for home purchase, help them to gain entry to middle-class membership in the UK (see chapter 2 for the close relationship between home ownership and class identity in the UK) and gain power in transnational, and sometimes inter-racial relationships (see chapter 6).

## INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP CAPITAL

Among various kinds of social relationships, migrants’ romantic relationships often play a crucial, if not the most important, role in facilitating extended stays and permanent immigration. In this thesis, I define intimate relationship capital as a person’s romantic relationship(s) and intimate resources.

One of the benefits of acquiring intimate relationship capital is that migrants can make use of it to obtain a dependant visa, a spouse visa, or an EEA family permit. The length of time a temporary migrant has in the UK is determined by his/her residency status, which can change through marrying or having a committed

romantic relationship with: (1) a British permanent resident/citizen, or an EU citizen; or (2) a temporary visa holder. However, apart from EU citizens who are not subject to British immigration rules, British citizens and UK-based visa sponsors can only sponsor a non-EEA migrant a spouse visa if they meet the minimum income or wealth requirement. The implication of this is that most of the Chinese migrants who managed to acquire a spouse visa by marrying a sponsor whose income bracket or amount of savings could reasonably be considered to position them as middle class, would be likely to form a middle-class family unit in the UK.

Job opportunities and life chances are unequal between spouses or partners of British or EU subjects, and spouses of temporary visa holders. Since the first group's right to live in the country is based on their marriage to a person who is not subjected to temporal restrictions, according to the informants, they are perceived to have acquired a "more permanent or settled" residency status. This is in contrast to the latter group, whose residency rights are tied to visa-sponsors who themselves only hold temporary residency status and have no indefinite leave to remain in the UK. In comparison to those who are married to a British subject, these migrants have a higher chance of being denied permanent jobs. They are more likely to be perceived as "uncommitted staff" who may have to leave the country sooner than employers hope. Despite this, those holding more years on their visa – for example spouses of PhD students – are usually (but not always) more employable than those who hold only a year or two on their visa due to their partners' shorter course lengths (see Yi Fung's example above). Intimate relationship capital can be converted to temporal capital, stratifying different visa holders by giving better life chances to some but limiting opportunities for others.

According to informants who were in a relationship with a British national, the relationship offered the potential not only of permanent residency and British citizenship, but also of other pragmatic gains. These informants generally considered that their English communication skills had improved; cultural knowledge had deepened; and social networks had expanded due to their transnational relationship or marriage. Many agreed that their British partner had taught them some life skills, local knowledge, and social skills that they would not have been able to attain otherwise, for example, how to find good rental properties in the UK. In other words, apart from being able to be converted into temporal capital, the

acquisition of intimate relationship capital was also positively perceived by my informants who used it to accumulate embodied cultural capital, and socially adapt and integrate into the new society.

## LIMITED ECONOMIC CAPITAL AND CHANGING IMMIGRATION POLICY

Despite their relatively well-off backgrounds, most of my informants admitted that they (and their family) had inadequate economic capital or funds to achieve investment immigration into the UK, which at the time of the interviews, was still available to non-EEA migrants. The discontinued Tier 1 (Entrepreneur) visa, which permitted individuals to enter and relocate to the UK for the purpose of establishing a business in the country, was replaced after 29 March 2019 by a new category of visa, the Innovator visa. This new category of visa is reputedly much more difficult to gain approval for, and has stricter rules surrounding continued compliance. In essence, a business must now be started by the applicant and endorsement for the business plan must be gained from a limited number of approved bodies – often venture capital firms seeking a stake in the business – according to a stringent set of criteria. Additionally, the applicant must pass an English language test at the outset and continue to spend three years working solely on the business, after which permanent residency will only be granted if certain criteria for the growth of the business have been met.

Although I only interviewed one male informant who held the discontinued Tier 1 (Entrepreneur) visa by opening a Japanese restaurant in London, and one female informant who was married to a Chinese migrant who once held the visa, most informants were aware of this immigration path. There used to be two major ways to acquire a Tier 1 visa in the UK. First of all, student migrants who obtained a British degree and had been officially endorsed as having a genuine and credible business idea were able to apply for a Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) visa. This visa allowed migrants to stay in the UK for one year, extend the stay for a further year, or switch onto a Tier 1 (Entrepreneur) visa with a minimum of £50,000 of investment funds. Very few student informants considered applying for this visa because they understood the difficulty of writing an excellent business proposal and anticipated that the chance of being granted the visa was low. For other non-EEA migrants who

did not previously hold a Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) visa, and had no access to £50,000 of investment funds from limited sources approved by the government, they had to possess at least £200,000 of investment funds in order to be able to apply for a Tier 1 (Entrepreneur) visa.

Most informants were not attracted to the Tier 1 (Entrepreneur) visa either due to insufficient funds or a pessimistic attitude towards the British economy. Some also commented that although they would like to obtain this visa, such big investment was regarded as “unworthy” by other family members who considered migration not merely an individual pursuit but also a collective goal. When I interviewed Winne, a 22-year-old Hong Kong migrant, in late 2016, her plan was to return to the UK after the expiration of her working holiday visa by persuading her family to invest in the UK. Since the new Innovator visa was introduced after my fieldwork had finished, I was not able to obtain data to understand how this change may impact migrants’ planning and options. But Winnie has recently told me that she felt “very confused” by the constant changes in British immigration policy and has lost the incentive to return to the UK.

## CONCLUSION

Following Bourdieu’s theory of capital and capital conversion (1986), I have shown that middle-class migrants from mainland China and Hong Kong do indeed accumulate and convert their various types of capital. For example, they exchange economic capital for cultural and temporal capital by paying for a university education in the UK. This rewards the migrant with the time and cultural experience of living and studying in the UK, as well as the skills gained from a university degree in their chosen field.

However, migration is not just an act of physical border crossing; it comes with other imposed boundaries, such as migration policies, the strictures of the labour market and even the social system of their new environment, that migrants also have to deal with (Liversage, 2009). My data shows that, should the migrant wish to stay on in the UK, the capital previously gained in this transactional process can be very difficult to convert back into economic capital or indeed further temporal capital to extend their stay in the UK. Tier 2 sponsored employment can be difficult to find at the best of times. However, at the conclusion of studies, when the temporal capital

remaining in the UK is just four months, migrants often particularly struggle to gain employment that offers Tier 2 visa sponsorship by the time their visas expire. Additionally, should the migrant find another way to stay in the UK, for example through marriage, their worth in the job market may not live up to expectations.

Therefore, I conclude that the conversion of cultural capital through temporary migration to the UK is not always a two-way street; rather, it is sometimes a dead end. This explains why migrants, even those who strongly wished to stay living in the UK, would from time to time consider returning to their country of origin, where skilled and well paid work is often a more realistic expectation, in order to be able to continue the transactional process that started at the beginning of their migration journeys and more fully realise the capital gained through their experiences in the UK. Having said that, for those who seek to build capital and be recognised as a successful migrant and a member of the middle class in the UK, they continue to navigate obstacles to capital conversion, and often rely on family capital and intimate relationship capital to keep pursuing their transnational goals. I have highlighted the importance of these two subtypes of social capital, especially when migrants' ability to convert cultural capital into economic and temporal capital is restricted by UK's societal mechanisms of exclusion imposed through immigration policies and preferences of employment in labour market.

In the next chapter, I will discuss another form of capital, i.e. sexual capital, which some migrants make use of in the quest for a committed relationship with a view to marriage in the UK. This kind of relationship may turn into intimate relationship capital, and subsequently temporal capital that I have discussed in this chapter.



## CHAPTER 4

### NAVIGATING ROMANCE, RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE

One day in September 2017, I went to my favourite Chinese restaurant near my university to get a takeaway for lunch. I have visited the restaurant many times and have known the middle-aged Chinese owner for a while, even though we have only ever exchanged friendly greetings. That day the small restaurant was extremely packed with new and returning students. Good business put the owner in an exceptionally good mood, and he was particularly talkative that day.

Owner (O): I haven't seen you for a while. I thought you have gone home!

Yu (Y): No, I am still around. I haven't finished my PhD yet.

O: What do you study?

Y: Social Anthropology.

O: Hmm, will you work in hospital after you graduate?

Y: Nah, I can't be a medical doctor. But I can work in university.

O: Do you want to stay in the UK?

Y: Yes, I do. I think it is more comfortable to live in the UK than Hong Kong.

O: Yes, I have lived here for many years now. I can't live in China anymore. The pollution is bad. It is crowded everywhere! Edinburgh is a nice place. The air here is fresh.

Y: I agree. I like living here too. But I don't know if I can stay living in the UK. You know, it all depends on whether I can find a job.

O: Oh just find a man and get married! Seriously, I know Chinese who were born here would love to date a Chinese who just arrived.

Y: Haha, it's not that easy! Having a relationship is a serious matter. Getting married is a big life decision!

O: Oh yes, I know what you mean. You don't want to just find a man and end up in an unhappy marriage.

Y: That's right.

It always fascinates me how easily a conversation with another Chinese person can turn to a topic that is highly relevant to my own experience of migration and my research. In the past four years, I have had numerous similar conversations with strangers that I have met in Chinese restaurants and supermarkets. My identity as a young female student migrant from Hong Kong indeed facilitates this kind of conversation. Middle-aged or older Chinese migrants, regardless of their gender, seem to enjoy sharing their migration experiences and giving me immigration advice. Whenever I express my concern about staying on after graduation, they

often say to me that the easiest way is to marry a British citizen. I do sometimes wonder if they would be as enthusiastic; and whether they would give me the same advice, if I were not a woman, but a man.

My positionality as a young woman certainly affects how strangers interact with me, and how they perceive marriage as an *appropriate* migration strategy for me. The conversation I have quoted here was clearly not the first such conversation I had had in the UK; it certainly was not going to be the last. It never ceases to surprise me how easy people think it is to get married to a British partner, and how acceptable this migration strategy seems to be among Chinese migrants.

Nevertheless, no one that I spoke to in the course of this research took marriage as a light decision. It seems to me that while the Chinese strangers that I spoke to did not find this pragmatic reason to form a marriage troubling, they all acknowledged the importance of mutual affection and compatibility in maintaining a happy and thriving marriage.

Heterosexual informants, regardless of gender, often saw marriage and family formation as essential life-course events that “complete” one’s life. Nearly all of the single heterosexual women that I talked to considered finding a marriageable partner a life goal to achieve; this includes those who were not actively looking, and those who claimed that they were not ready to start a relationship. Since I did not have significant numbers of homosexual and bisexual men and women in my interview sample, I am not able to generalise about their views of marriage. The two bisexual men in my sample were distinctive in their romantic experiences. While Ronald, in his mid-twenties, was interested in dating men and women, despite having a stable partner; Han, a 29-year-old PhD student, was having a long-distance relationship at the time of interview. The only homosexual informant I had, David, who I have discussed in chapter 2, had been in a civil partnership for 4 years at the time of interview. David said he did not believe in marriage nor the idea of true love because of his personal experiences. Describing his partner as a “good friend”, David said his reason for entering into a civil partnership was mainly the benefits it offered in securing a mortgage.

For some informants, the desire to look for romance went hand-in-hand with the wish to stay on in the UK. Others, who had no initial intention to remain in the UK,

had become marriage migrants and ended up staying on because of their transnational relationship. To my knowledge, very few informants had instrumental intentions in seeking a romantic relationship in the first place. Due to the limitations of interviewing as the main research method, and the sensitivity of the topic discussed, it is possible that informants who found a British or EU partner mainly for immigration purposes were not willing to divulge this fact to me. However, I should emphasise that migrants very often have multiple desires simultaneously; these desires are complex, and sometimes contradictory. It is equally important to bear in mind that not all migrants long for a committed, long-term, and stable relationship; some may also be willing to enter a relationship that they expect to last only temporarily.

This chapter is based on and expands upon my published article “Permanence pending: how young Chinese temporary migrants hope to stay in the UK” (2018). In this chapter, I explore the romantic goals and experiences of young, well-educated, middle-class Chinese temporary migrants, and ask how they strategise different kinds of relationships, for example by making use of sexual capital and the language of love.

## THE SEARCH FOR ROMANCE AND THE SOCIAL PRESSURE TO MARRY

Looking for romance is definitely a reason for me to come to the UK... I was a *mai jing ze* (literally meaning the leftover bamboo that never gets sold in the market) in Hong Kong.

*(Vivian, 28 years old Hong Kong Chinese woman, in a relationship with a British permanent resident from Hong Kong)*

When I first came to the UK, I was very bored. I didn't have any friends apart from my four flatmates from Hong Kong, so I started to meet friends online. At the time, one of my flatmates used Tinder to look for a boyfriend. She recommended the app to me, so I started to use it too.

*(Gina, 30 years old, Hong Kong Chinese woman, in a relationship with a British man)*

Narratives like Vivian's and Gina's were commonly expressed by my female informants, who saw temporary migration to the UK as not merely a means to

acquire overseas qualifications and work experience, but also a chance to explore romantic opportunities (Ding and Ho 2008; Shah 2006), meet new friends, secure a life-long partner, and escape temporarily from the social stigma of their singlehood. Another example is Elle, a 27-year-old mainland Chinese migrant who moved to London with her family nearly a decade ago. She considered herself a settled migrant now and commented that each short trip to China was a struggle because of the intense familial pressure she felt in regard to marrying. She said,

Now when I go back to China to visit my family, my grandparents always say to me, "you are 27 already, why don't you get married? Look, your cousin is one year younger than you, and she is married!" I can only escape this pressure if I stay living in the UK.

Although Elle could escape from the direct familial pressure to marry as long as she stayed living in the UK, she was also aware that her distancing from the dominant social opinion was a temporary measure only, and had no significant impact on her desired life achievements which centred on the themes of marriage and family. Elle said to me,

I actually do want to get married now... But the point is I have to find someone that I am interested in and is suitable for me. I hope it will happen soon.

All of the women that I interviewed were familiar with the stigmatising concepts of "loser dogs" (Nakano 2016; Yamaguchi 2006) and *sheng nu* (Fincher 2014; Ji 2015; To 2013) that have travelled through social media and mass media, including TV dramas and movies, into China (Fincher 2014) and Hong Kong (Ling 2013), making women feel less secure and comfortable about their singlehood. In Hong Kong, the issue of women's singledom and their inability to find a man to achieve a happy marriage is discussed in popular reality TV shows such as *Bride Wannabes*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Bride Wannabes* is a popular Hong Kong reality TV show aired in 2012, which features five women in their 30s. The women were coached by "love and life coaches" for six months, with the hopes of boosting their marriage prospects. In a newspaper article entitled "Hong Kong Glued to 'Bride Wannabes'", written by Te-Ping Chen and published by The Wall Street Journal on 20 April 2012, it said, "Along the way, with a documentary film crew in tow, they [the five women] go to cosmetic surgery clinics, get makeup tips, learn what length of an SMS message will keep a man tantalized and finesse their ability to keep their mouth shut."

(2012), and TV dramas, for example *Bounty Lady*<sup>20</sup> (2013). In both TV productions', the Chinese phrase “盛女,” or “blossomed woman,” is used in the Chinese title. The phrase works as a pun on the phrase “剩女,” or leftover woman.

The Chinese word “剩”(sheng) refers to leftover food, which must be discarded. In Hong Kong specifically, numerous Cantonese phrases, such as *mai jing ze* and *luo di cheng* (which refers to leftover oranges at the bottom of a basket), are used traditionally to describe women who have passed their golden time of marrying; are unable to get married; or are not being picked by men when their time is ripe. While these once old-fashioned terms are now being used again, more contemporary terms, such as “*gong leui*” (literally meaning “Hong Kong woman”) are more commonly used to relate women's singlehood to their undesirable qualities, such as being “selfish, shallow, critical of men and demanding” (Nakano 2016, 368). Such catch-phrases reflect the struggles of and social pressure applied to Hong Kong Chinese women who remain single beyond a certain age.

Fincher (2014, 6) looks at how the discourse of leftover women in China is state-sponsored, and how such a category is produced by a state media campaign to “achieve its demographic goals of promoting marriage, planning population and maintaining social stability”. Although China's sex ratio imbalance at birth is the highest observed in the world, which at its peak in 2004 was 121.2 boys to 100 girls (Zhou 2016), rather than promoting the shortage of marriageable-aged women, the Chinese government stigmatises single educated women in their late twenties, producing the fear that these women are doomed to stay single forever. Leftover men are considered more of a problem for uneducated or rural families.

In the urban areas of China however, the discourse of marriage stigmatises single women, but not single men, even though both single men and women are seen as

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<sup>20</sup> *Bounty Lady* is a 2013 Hong Kong modern drama produced by TVB, starring by Dayo Wong, who played the role of Heung Kwong-Nam, a relationship expert who helps single female clients to find love and achieve the goal of marriage.

potential threats to the “harmonious society” in the eyes of the state. The Chinese government believes that men need to get married and mould into the Chinese family system, as this keeps them away from political activism. The state carries out this scheme by pressuring single educated women into marrying to fulfil their duties as wives and mothers.

Unlike their mainland Chinese counterparts, Hong Kong women in general are not heavily pressured by state media to get married; most women, as Nakano (2016, 375) puts it, see marriage “as a lifestyle choice rather than a requirement”. Nakano (2016) argues that the widespread social acceptance of single women in Hong Kong can be attributed to three factors: (1) a history of marriage refusal among women in south China from the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century; (2) the delayed age of first-time marriage among women, brought about by industrial development between the 1950s and 1970s; and (3) the positive approach of families to delayed marriage because it means a continuous contribution of young women’s salaries from factory work to their family (see Salaff 1981).

In fact, most of my friends in Hong Kong, both men and women, started to give part of their salary to their parents (usually their mothers) or to contribute to the household expenses and bills after they got their first job as a way to observe filial piety. Although unmarried women’s monthly contribution to their family is seen as a legitimate reason for them to receive minimal familial pressure to marry, women themselves may feel ambivalent about this. For example, a close friend of mine complained about how her mother demanded half of her monthly salary, leaving her with no savings to start a family with her current boyfriend. Another friend told me that his parents wanted him to stay living with them even after getting married so that his monthly contribution would continue to help with the mortgage payments, which he strongly refused. My general understanding of Hong Kong young people’s financial contribution to their family echoes to Salaff (1981) and Nakano’s (2016) findings.

As for my mainland Chinese informants, including men and women, although making financial contributions to the family is not an unfamiliar concept, they

considered it more of a “dated” expectation<sup>21</sup>. Most informants said that their parents did not expect them to do so, and elaborated with statements to the effect “I think in the eyes of my parents, the best way for me to observe filial piety is not to pay them back for the money that they have spent on me, but to show them I am able to sustain myself and pursue happiness.”

Although Hong Kong women are arguably less pressured by being single as compared to mainland Chinese women, it would be a mistake to assume that they are completely free from the social pressure and expectation to marry. My interviews with Hong Kong women made me realise that women could feel anxious about their singlehood simply by comparing themselves to their peers who had married and/or become mothers. One informant said that sometimes scrolling through her own Facebook page, which contained photos of her friends getting married or people attending a wedding, made her upset. In general, I did not detect any differences between the mainland China and Hong Kong cohorts in terms of the social pressure to marry. Some Hong Kong informants who worked in woman-dominated industries back home, such as nursing and teaching, told me that their chance of finding a marriageable partner was small because of their profession. Other informants who worked in more gender-balanced jobs also found themselves “lacking luck” in the Hong Kong market. As compared to women in mainland China who are familiar with the practice of *xiangqin* (blind dates with a view to marriage), Hong Kong women are more reluctant to participate in blind dates and prefer to meet potential spouses through the workplace or introductions from friends (Nakano 2016). Therefore, for those who fail to find a marriageable partner among their friends and colleagues or through dating apps, moving abroad, even if it is temporary, may provide a chance to look beyond the local marriage market.

## STRATEGISING ROMANCE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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<sup>21</sup> For studies of the reinterpretation and transformation of filial piety in modern China, see Qun and Devine (2018) and Tu (2016).

Due to a lack of social networks in the UK, Chinese temporary migrants in this study relied on social media, mainly dating apps, to meet potential partners.

I tried to date a few guys using an app before. But they were all very strange! One of the guys was Turkish. Before meeting him, I thought he was a local white guy but he was not. I swear I couldn't tell he was Turkish from his profile. When we met, the first thing he said to me was that he had already got British citizenship. He said I didn't need to work and I could just stay at home and take care of the children. I was shocked! My housemate then advised me to try using Tinder. They said I would have less chance to meet weird people online. The way that Tinder works is that you and the person you are interested in have to "like" each other before you two can start talking. If you don't "like" his profile, then there will be no further conversation. Then I saw my current boyfriend's profile on Tinder.

*(Gina, 30 years old, in a relationship with a British man)*

I met my boyfriend for the first time in person during a conference trip to London. It was a very funny experience because we met through an app called Tinder. At the time, I was a new member. I saw all of my classmates were using this app on their mobile, so I thought this must be a very trendy social app like Facebook. I downloaded it but I didn't know how to use it properly. I "liked" many profiles on Tinder and got lots of messages... Only after a while, I read the instructions again and realised I shouldn't have "liked" everyone that I saw on the app. But this is how my boyfriend and I met each other. Very soon, we became boyfriend and girlfriend.

*(Rose, 28 years old, in a relationship with an English man for a year)*

The majority of informants who used dating apps in the UK said they had not used them before migration and had to learn how to build an attractive personal profile, flirt in English, and approach people with appropriate manners. A few informants were experienced users, but they too had to learn how to use dating apps in a different language and cultural context. Gina's experience is interesting as it reflects some of the mismatches and incompatibilities in the expectations of my informants and their dates or partners from different cultures or class backgrounds (including people from mainland China and Hong Kong dating one another) about gendered social roles within marriage and family obligations. While Tinder was the most popular app among both of my heterosexual and homosexual male and female Chinese informants, homosexual and bisexual male informants also used other dating apps such as Grindr and Scruff.

During our first interview in March 2016, Ronald, a 22-year-old student migrant, had already lived with his EU partner, who was twice his age, for more than a year. The



couple had met through a dating app. He openly admitted that his primary reason for using dating apps was to find a British or EU citizen who could help him to stay in the UK by forming a civil partnership. During the process of looking for a partner, he also explored his sexuality and accumulated different experiences in approaching and dating men and women. He said,

It all started when my best friend Sophia in the UK went online to look for sugar daddies to support her life. She persuaded me to find similar opportunities online. She said to me, "We are still young. We shouldn't worry so much about moral or ethical issues." She gave me this inspiration and I was crazy about this idea. From that moment onwards, I realised that it is very easy to meet men. You can simply create a profile online, then there would be 50 to 60 men chatting with you at any given time. But if you try to get women's attention, you have to spend more time on them. Men are relatively easy compared to women. I use many apps and one website called seekingarrangement.com to chat with both men and women. But the website I used did not help me find a potential partner because most of the users are married. Grindr, Tinder and Scruff are some of the apps that I use. I use Scruff to meet women and use others to look for men. I am very addicted. Of course, I want to find potential partners. But I got so addicted because once I am online, there would be many people chatting with me, and they find me attractive. It is a very good feeling. I've chatted with at least 200 people through dating apps. I used a minimum of four hours per day to use these apps... Some people only use these apps to chat; some only use them for sex; others want a real relationship. When I use these apps, I've never approached people first, but waited for them to text me. This way I know their intention, and I know that I am attractive to them. I would not waste time in figuring out who finds me attractive and who not. I've never initiated a conversation online. I am very proud of it...I think I am very tactical about this...When I have a conversation with a guy, I would not show I am very desperate to stay in the UK because I know they would not like it. If they are serious about having a relationship with me, they would keep messaging me, even if I don't reply. I would act very cold to them sometimes, but I would also keep them close by. For some people whom I find attractive, I would have sex with them. If I don't find them attractive, I would at least make friends with them. Through these apps, I've met different people and formed different relationships. You see, I have 5 types of relationships. The first one is that a person finds me attractive, but I don't. I would keep in touch with him and give him false hope, but I would never actually go out and meet him. The second one is that the attraction is mutual, but not too strong; in this case, I would have no-strings-attached one-time sex with him. The third type is regular sexual partners, which usually develop after one sexual encounter. The fourth type is the friendship-only type with no sexual involvement. The fifth type is a "real" relationship, something like girlfriend/boyfriend, which I have now.

Here, Ronald gave a very detailed account of how the dating apps work, the multiple motivations of dating apps users, and how he was able to make use of social media and some sexual tactics to form different types of relationships. He continued,

I have multiple relationships or one foot in many boats as you may say, but I have to stress that I've never told these people that we are in an exclusive relationship... Having said that, they wouldn't know I go out with other people too. I've been quite clever to deceive them. It is like I have a few threads in my hands. I would keep trying to see which thread could lead me to something bigger. I also consider my own feelings of course. If I don't like that person, I wouldn't want to have a relationship with him or her, even though he or she may offer to help me stay here. I was really looking for someone I like, who was attractive to me, and was willing to help me. This is what I call "the trump card". In the end, I only found one.

Ronald, who considered each type of relationship as distinct, serving different purposes, seemed to know how to keep different men (and sometimes women) at bay. This echoes Hoang and Yeoh's (2015, 599) study on "immigrant cultures of sexuality", which explores how communicative technology enables migrants to explore romance, love, and sexuality, and obtain practical gains; and how the mingling of emotional needs and pragmatic interests in different kinds of intimate relationships is inevitable.

During one interview, Ronald told me that he had stopped seeing different people but tried to be in "an exclusive relationship" with his partner. But even "partner", as one of the relationship categories, did not come naturally. Over the course of three interviews, he first described the man he lived with as his "flatmate", then as his "special friend with benefits", and finally as his "partner". These categories were unstable and unfixed. A few months after describing his relationship as exclusive, he was active on dating apps again. At the same time, he told me that he had also stopped relying on marriage or a sexual relationship with one person as the only immigration strategy. As an opportunist, after completing his first degree in social science, Ronald decided to do a second degree in nursing; a degree that he was able to study with a full NHS bursary and which would guarantee a UK work visa upon graduation. In 2018, Ronald ended his 3-year relationship with his partner and moved out of their shared house. He is currently in a new relationship.

## ROMANCE AS A MEANS TO BUILD SOCIAL NETWORKS

My informants' motivations for looking for a partner and having a romantic relationship varied. In some cases, they started to explore romantic opportunities not because they were keen to be in a relationship but because they considered engaging in and talking about dating as a way to establish friendships in a new environment. This applies to Winnie, a 23-year-old working holiday maker from Hong Kong. She said,

I worked in a Chinese restaurant, and many of my colleagues were from mainland China, Taiwan and Malaysia. When I first introduced myself, they frequently asked about my plans for the future and what I would do after spending two years in London. Frankly, I was so new to this country and was not sure about my next move, but they seemed to be really keen to know, and the conversations would always turn to how I could stay in the UK. I remember my colleagues always said to me, "Just find a man!" In their eyes, finding a man in the UK and getting married is the most direct way to get permanent residency. Then a Taiwanese colleague introduced me to an app, and said it was fun. I then started to exchange messages with a few guys and had a few dates. My colleagues were always interested in how my date went.

Winnie realised that by identifying herself as a temporary migrant with an interest in staying in the UK, she could quickly receive social acceptance from her colleagues. In a way, the temporality of her residence and her "plans for the future" affected how people related to her, and how much effort they made to establish a bond (or boundary) with her. Winnie's social experience changed when she expressed her desire to remain; this helped her to secure friendship among "experienced migrants" who had been in her position, and were willing to share their stories of success and their immigration advice. According to Winnie, the narrative of "just find a man" was widely circulated and popular among her female colleagues. But romantic encounters and gossip about the appearance, manners, and characters of the men migrant women date are only part of the story. More importantly, migrant women's social networks and identity are deeply entangled within this narrative.

Migrants in this study also used different kinds of social media to build new social networks, before and after they arrived in the UK, which in turn helped them to settle in the new society, acquire local knowledge, and even find potential partners. Here, I will share two migrant women's stories as examples. Ling was a 22-year-old mainland Chinese migrant who was married to a British citizen from Hong Kong.

Ling met her husband in the UK through a friend, whom she met through an app before departing from China. Ling said,

After I received my master's degree offer from the university, I was so happy. I spent the whole summer in 2012 in China doing pretty much nothing and preparing myself for studying abroad. Since I had so much free time, I went online to meet people who lived in Edinburgh already. I added two or three friends on WeChat. One of them was a guy who worked in Scotland at the time. I told him that I was coming to Edinburgh to study. I asked him about the weather; how to open a bank account; what I should bring with me; what kind of accommodation I should choose if I don't want to live in a university dormitory etc. Although I hadn't met him at the time, he helped me a lot. After I arrived Edinburgh, he was very keen to ask me out. He worked in Fife, Scotland. I was a bit scared because I just got here. I didn't even know how to get from point A to Point B... One day in October, he invited me to go to Fife again. He said, "My boss has a boat, he can take you out to the sea if you want". I thought this idea sounds very attractive... I remember thinking to myself I would go and enjoy a day out and I would come home before dark. I thought if I wasn't going to spend the night there, it should be fine. But in the end, I cancelled on him because I didn't feel well. But the week after, he invited me again, and I finally went to Fife. By the way, this friend is not my husband! He is the employee of my husband – a Chinese takeaway owner that took me on a boat trip. This is how we met.

*(Ling, 22 years old, married to a British citizen from Hong Kong)*

Another example was Belle, a young woman from Hong Kong who came to the UK for an arts degree and is now married to an English PhD student, Chris. Belle also used social media, such as Facebook, to meet friends in the UK before she arrived. For a period of time after her arrival in the UK, her feelings of love had swung between two prospective suitors – one of them was Chris, now her husband, and another was Oliver, a young Englishman who was one of the first contacts Belle had in the UK. Oliver and Belle became friends on Facebook a few months before Belle's arrival in London. Oliver was also the first person that Belle turned to when she thought she was in trouble. Belle said,

On the day Chris and I first met, he was just a stranger to me. We had a smoothie, and then he wanted to show me the city of London so we could hang out for a bit longer. That was fine with me. But then he said he wanted to have dinner with me. I didn't really want to. I was a bit scared. I'd never dated anyone before. And we just met! I was not sure it would be a good idea so I asked my friend Oliver to come pick me up... Chris and Oliver both chased me for a few months and gave me time to think carefully about which one I wanted to be with.

Both Ling and Belle used social media to secure virtual friendships that helped them to establish social networks and settle in the UK later. As most of the informants had no close family members or relatives in the UK, the social networks that they formed in their daily lives and in the virtual world were particularly useful for providing practical tips about living in the UK, cultural exchange, and a route to explore romantic opportunities in a new country.

Although it may seem that Ling and Belle were able to accumulate social capital before migration, regardless of the geographical distance and time difference between the UK and China/Hong Kong, their choice of communication methods was in fact limited. In contrast to the relatively free socio-political environment in Hong Kong, in the mainland, information flows and exchanges among citizens are strictly controlled and monitored by the Chinese government to maintain political and social order. Through implementing the Golden Shield Project (or commonly nicknamed The Great Firewall of China), one of the most sophisticated internet censorship and surveillance systems in the world, the Chinese government largely denies Chinese citizens access to popular western internet services, such as Facebook, Google, WhatsApp, Tinder, Twitter, Snapchat and YouTube (see Griffiths 2019). Although many foreigners and some Chinese citizens are able to log on to virtual private networks (VPNs) to access content hosted outside of China, the number of people who are able to “climb over” the firewall is still expected to be significantly small compared to the total number of internet users in China. As a result, it is likely that mainland Chinese migrants, such as Ling, can only gain access to people who live overseas who are also the users of mobile applications that are approved by the Chinese government, such as WeChat. It is therefore not a coincidence that Ling’s first contact in the UK was a mainland Chinese man who migrated to Scotland years ago; and Belle’s first friend was a white Londoner who used Facebook regularly.

Choices of social media pre-determine and limit not only the kinds of social capital that to-be migrants can obtain, but also the length of time that these forms of capital can be kept. It is my general observation that while many of my mainland Chinese informants downloaded western social media, such as Facebook in the UK, few became frequent users. WeChat was still the main way for them to maintain contact with family and friends in China, and to establish

new contacts within the mainland Chinese community in the UK. The majority did, however, tend to use Facebook, Gmail and WhatsApp to keep in touch with non-mainland Chinese networks in the UK. Many commented that these networks could easily be lost, especially after their return to China. Similar observations can be made for the young Hong Kong migrants, who use WeChat to keep in touch with their mainland Chinese friends in the UK but may stop using it upon their return to Hong Kong.

## STRATEGISING RELATIONSHIPS

Ronald's, Ling's and Belle's use of social media and accumulation of social capital helped them to strategise different kinds of relationships, and to find romantic, and even marriage, opportunities in the UK. In Ling's narrative, her first male friend in the UK was very keen to take her out, even though Ling kept cancelling their dates. It was a significant friendship in Ling's migration trajectory, and possibly a romance that failed to blossom. Although Ling had never mentioned whether she had feelings for her male friend, and it was unclear whether her friend had a romantic interest in her, she talked about how her now-husband initially hesitated to get her phone number because he thought she was his employee's girlfriend. When Ling's relationship was established, she moved into her husband's house, which was shared among other employees who worked in the Chinese takeaway, including her male friend. Ling described the situation as "slightly embarrassing".

Belle also had a significant male friendship. In Belle's story, Oliver was a very lively and vivid character – he was Belle's first friend in London, her protector and suitor. According to Belle, Oliver tried to win her heart by suggesting that Chris was "not a sociable guy" and he and Belle were "not a good match". In the end, even though Belle considered Oliver "a good guy", she chose Chris because her feelings towards Oliver were just "not as strong", and "Chris was more handsome".

Previous studies have looked at how having different types of relationships with different types of men who are able to meet a specific set of needs are very important for migrant women who come from a low socio-economic background, or those who are underprivileged (see Brennan 2003; 2004; Constable 2005; Cheng 2010; Parreñas 2011). Less attention has been paid to the different sexual relationships that migrant women who are considered to have more resources may strategise. None of my female informants admitted to me that they had multiple relationships at any given time. However, I heard from a Chinese friend, who was also a PhD student in the UK, that this practice may be more common than what my interview materials reveal.

For around a year, my friend shared a flat with a Chinese couple in Scotland. The woman was a business master's student in her mid-twenties. The man was in his mid-thirties and was a Chinese takeaway owner. While the man often returned home late because of the late opening hours of the takeaway business, my friend noticed that the woman was sometimes driven home by another man. My friend witnessed how her flatmate seemed to stay in the car parked downstairs for "a suspiciously long time", and how she occasionally showed off branded hand bags that my friend suspected were bought by someone other than her boyfriend. Soon, my friend's suspicions about the affair were confirmed not only by her flatmate's confession, but also because this "mysterious young man" became an acquaintance of my friend, who often texted her and tried to collect information from her. In one of these messages, her flatmate's lover admitted that he was aware of his role as a "spare tyre", but he was confident that he would be the winner in the end because he considered himself to have better job prospects than his competitor; "after all, being a Chinese chef is simply not a high-class job", he texted. This story that my friend shared allowed me to catch a glimpse of how some migrants may make use of various forms of social capital and relationships, including friends, lovers, and partners, to navigate their lives in the UK. Migrants' involvement in multiple relationships cannot be solely explained by materialistic and calculative intentions; for some, it may be gratifying to have two (or more) relationships with men or women at a given time in their lives because receiving sexual attention, being desired, and creating jealousy among different suitors can be very empowering. Doing

romance, negotiating “love”, and strategising relationships through messaging, testing the boundaries of intimacy, and even just imagining romance, are important experiences of subject-making (Cheng 2010), helping migrants to achieve goals, and satisfy their desires.

#### MIGRANTS’ AGENCY IN MAKING USE OF SEXUAL CAPITAL AND NEGOTIATING LOVE

Many young Chinese temporary migrants enjoy a higher degree of sexual autonomy through migration and anonymity, which enable the expression of sexuality in a liberal and empowering way (Bech 1998; Cantú 2009; Cheng 2010; Gaetano 2008). Informants such as Vivian, Belle, and Kelly described how they were able, at least to a certain extent, to wear revealing outfits and provocative make-up without worrying about the gaze of others for the first time in their lives after moving to the UK. They commented on how such freedom was not available in Hong Kong and China, as they were expected to conform to conservative gender norms, especially in public areas. Belle was especially frustrated that she could not wear “sexy clothes” on the MTR in Hong Kong because of unwanted attention, not just from men but also from women.

Apart from being able to express female sexuality in a relatively less restricted way, my informants were aware that their gender qualities and ethnic traits had a different value in the UK. For example, Ronald understood that his youth and masculinity with a relatively more feminine tendency were desirable among some people in the LGBT community in London. Many studies have looked at how a sensual and feminine Oriental body is stereotypically perceived (see Yokoyama 1986; Hu 2016), and associated with virtues such as tenderness, gentleness, and slenderness. The same physical attributes and temperaments are also often used to describe Chinese/Asian men (Kong 2011), which constructs a masculine discourse of a certain global hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), and affirms western superiority (Hoang 2014). When asked about how he perceived his sexual attractiveness in the dating market, Ronald said,



My (ex)partner once said to me he likes me because I'm different from those Thai boys he dated before, that he can actually talk to me on an intellectual level.

Appearance and physical attributes are not the only form of sexual capital Ronald possesses; his cultural capital as a university graduate with good English proficiency and manners can also be converted into sexual capital. Here, sexual capital has a class element. The ability to talk intellectually is related to embodied cultural capital, which according to Ronald, also enhanced his sexual attractiveness. Possessing this sexual capital, Ronald was able to attract the *right* people who might be able to help him stay in the UK. Therefore, sexual capital is linked to intimate relationship capital, which can potentially be converted into temporal capital.

Depending on one's sexuality, gender qualities and ethnic traits may be imagined and perceived by others differently. In Kelly's case, looking less Chinese was considered to be an advantage in attracting sexual attention. She said,

Sometimes I think I look more like a Thai or a Malaysian. And people here like women of these nationalities more than Chinese. I attracted quite a lot of black guys' attention. There was a black guy who used to text me all the time and said he liked me. He already has a wife, but he just kept chasing me and said I look sexy.

Migrants learn to perform their racialised femininity and masculinity in a new cultural and geographical context. They also adopt different tactics to negotiate sex, delay sex, and capitalise on the value of virginity to seek commitment through emphasising their Asian cultural origin. In Vivian's example, before meeting her husband John, she had her first sexual encounter with a Middle Eastern man. The relationship lasted for a few months.

Vivian (V): Every time we went on a date, we went to the cinema and made out. Sometimes when I spent a night at his house, we had oral sex. But if he tried to stick it in, I always stopped him.

Yu (Y): Why did you stop him?

V: You see...I'm a virgin. He wanted to have sex, but he wasn't willing to commit. I just couldn't give in. We've completely different values about sex and relationships. I can't lose my virginity to a guy who doesn't even love me.

Vivian was in love, but she was not willing to have casual sex in a non-committed relationship. During the process of negotiating love and sex, Vivian hoped that the man she was seeing would "open up" and become committed. The man, on the

other hand, praised Vivian for being different to other women that he dated, and said that she “deserved someone better”. After migration, Vivian pushed the sexual boundary from “no intimacy at all”, which was strictly set by her parents, to “making out without losing my virginity (by having penetrative sex)”. It was through the processes of sexual exploration and negotiation, such as deciding which sexual acts were acceptable, that Vivian was transformed into a sexual subject. While acquiring sexual knowledge and skills in flirtation, Vivian held onto the value of virginity, which represents a woman’s purity and innocence, to delay further sexual advancement and seek commitment (Yu 2018). This echoes what Cheng (2010, 143) describes as “the power of virginity”:

Claims of virginity were important for women in managing their sexuality – in maintaining an image of female innocence that might be “given” to the right man while at the same time putting off sexual advances.

In Farrer's (2010, 75) sociological definition, sexual capital is “a person’s resources, competencies and endowments that provide status as sexual agents within a field”. “Status” here is a key word that shows that an individual’s resources, competencies and endowments cannot be separated from their own habitus. Sexual capital, in Farrer’s definition, does not only concern the body (e.g. appearance and physical attributes), but also how the body is presented and maintained, for example what clothes to wear, what makeup to use and what beauty services to regularly attend to, and the appropriate mannerisms displayed by the body.

I argue that virginity as a form of capital is a different subtype of sexual capital, in that it retains its highest value by not being used, or being used in the *right context* and at the *right time*. Most Chinese middle-class families and young people consider marriage a compulsory step in life (Rocca 2017). In Hong Kong, the daughters of middle-class families are taught to have good moral values in sex and marriage from a young age (see Yu 2013). Although cohabitation and premarital sex have become more common in China and Hong Kong (Friedman 2006; Yu 2013), a woman’s virginity is still considered to be valuable and the protection of it remains a core subject of sexual moral education among middle-class families in East Asia to ensure a good lifepath for their children without it being ruined by the risk of unplanned pregnancy from uncommitted relationships (see Supametaporn et al. 2010; Yu 2013).

In Vivian's case, after giving up on developing her initial relationship into a committed one, she met John and soon they were together. This time Vivian had more confidence that the relationship would work. After they first had sex, Vivian stressed to John that her virginity had been given to "the right person". She thus retained the value of virginity for negotiating power and the prospect of marrying. The couple first discussed marriage six months into their relationship. Vivian saw John's willingness to consider marrying her, despite the brevity of their courtship, as an expression of his love. But for a year, John was not ready to propose to her. In Vivian's opinion, this was because they were still in the process of evaluating each other based on how much "love" was given. She said she understood John's reservation and his expectation that she shows him that her love was "non-instrumental". To erase John's doubt, Vivian emphasised the good life that she had in Hong Kong, and how insignificant settlement in the UK was to her.

In Ronald's case, love was a discursively constructed category, and could be seen as a performance, as Brennan (2004) suggests. During our first interview, Ronald told me that he did not "love" his ex-partner. He said,

I think he likes me much more than I like him. I enjoy his company. I like his character. But I don't think I love him.

Ronald told me that he pretended to love his ex-partner by calling him intimate names, and saying that he missed him when they could not see each other. He also expressed his ambivalence about staying in the UK so that his partner felt insecure in the relationship and would be more eager to help him stay. This echoes Kabeer's (1999, 438) observation that an individual's agency "can take the form of bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance as well as more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis". Even though Ronald used his sexual capital and the language of love to form a relationship from which he gained advantages, including living with his ex-partner without paying any rent or bills, he also reciprocated by being the type of person that his ex-partner wanted, satisfying his sexual demands, and giving him care and support.

The performativity of love and "real love" are sometimes not easy to disentangle. Ronald admitted that his feelings had changed over a year. Not willing to name his feelings as "love", however, he said that the relationship constituted mutuality and

reciprocity, and that he had developed “genuine feelings” towards his ex-partner. During an interview in early 2017, a year after I first interviewed Ronald, he said,

I can't say I have no feelings for him. If you spend enough time with a cat or dog, the feeling for the animal will grow naturally. I don't know if I love him because I have never loved someone in my life. I don't know how it is supposed to feel. But I care about him. I take care of him when he is sick. We have each other's back.

## TEMPORARY LOVE RELATIONSHIPS

While most relationships and marriages I have discussed so far are relatively committed or stable, not all relationships are formed with a view to marriage; some are temporary and short-term, and help migrants to pass time and satisfy their emotional or physical needs. Mike was a PhD student in his late twenties, who had had a few relationships in the past four years. He only dated Chinese international students who studied at his university. He said,

I think having a relationship in the UK is very different compared to in China. Dating someone here is like you are in a vacuum (*zhen kong*) of time. Every relationship here happens and ends so quickly. The process of falling in love and breaking up is all intensely compressed and done quickly. Most relationships that I heard of ended in the airport. In my opinion, the airport is like the grave of love. It is the last place and the last time couples see each other. For a lot of young international students, every encounter here is just a temporary coincidence. This is the country where they meet and say bye. They are just transient (*guo ke*) in each other's life. I have seen so many Chinese couples here who would never be together at all, had it not been for their temporary stays in the UK. If they were both in China, they would have never met each other in their lives. These couples are actually not suitable for each other. When one person in a relationship has to leave the UK, and the other one has to stay for longer, they are very likely to break up. If a couple's visas expire at the same time, they will have a 10% chance of staying with each other after returning to China. But 90% of the time they will break up because the necessary conditions for them to stay together do not exist anymore. In the UK, these couples stay together for one or two years because they are lonely. They want something from each other. But once they return to China, they will have many more choices of partner. They don't have to stick with that same person anymore.

The “vacuum of time” that Mike describes in his quote reflects how he sees his romantic experiences in the UK as a separate entity or a sidetrack to his main life-course trajectory. Within this, relationships are formed and broken under circumstances very different from those that he might find himself in at home. This state is conditioned by migrants’ temporary status in the UK, which allows them to forgo their usual criteria or considerations in choosing a partner, such as the compatibility of class background or family opinion. This sentiment was echoed in another statement made by Mike in a later interview, “When we are together, we just enjoy the moment, and don’t think about the future”. Although the future is uncertain, in Mike’s perception, it is imagined as a time when things will go “back to normal”, when migrants will return to their socio-cultural environment, letting go of the relationship that they formed in the UK.

Mike struck me as holding a romantic disposition. However, despite this and perhaps as a result of his cumulative experiences of unsuccessful relationships in the UK, in which multiple women broke up with him upon their return to China – and one of whom even blocked him on all social media accounts and disappeared - Mike resigned himself to the opinion that relationships in the UK, like migration, were temporary in nature.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have discussed the strategies adopted by young Chinese temporary migrants and their agency in finding partners, experiencing romance, and seeking marriage and immigration opportunities in the UK. The use of social media, including WeChat and Facebook, and especially dating apps, such as Tinder, is one of the main ways in which migrants build new social networks, develop different kinds of relationships, and meet potential partners. It is important to note that migrants’ desires, romantic goals, experiences, and outcomes can also be related to capital building. As I have demonstrated with examples of Ronald and Vivian, in the process of exploring and expressing their sexualities, they are also empowered by making use of sexual capital, cultural capital, and the language of love to do romance, gain intimate relationship capital and negotiate power within their

relationships. I have also shown that Chinese migrants' romantic relationships are highly contextual choices, shaped by the inevitable mingling of emotions and practical interests. For example, some migrants seek to maintain a relationship for a longer period of time, or even to enter marriage, converting their intimate relationship capital into temporal capital to prolong their stays in the UK. But for those who may find relationships in the UK a temporary and short-term occurrence, such relationships are not to be seen as contributing to the capital conversion processes.

By scrutinising the processes of conversion between sexual capital, intimate relationship capital and temporal capital, this chapter contributes to the discussion of middle-class sexuality. The complex nature of sexuality that could be strategic (Hirsch 2003) and tangled with romantic love has been discussed in the rich migration scholarship on sex workers or those who have low socio-economic status (for example, see Brennan, 2003, 2004; Chen, 2008; Cheng, 2010). Little is known, however, about the sexual strategies and conversion processes of sexual capital of migrants who consider themselves as coming from a middle-class background. In Ronald and Vivian's cases, the inconvertibility of their institutionalised cultural capital has shifted their focus on the acquisition of social capital in the UK. Their stories also show that in the context of migration, when cultural capital cannot be easily converted into economic, symbolic and social capital, middle-class migrants have to be creative in their ways of building and using new forms of capital.

## CHAPTER 5

### “THE CLOCK IS TICKING”: TIME AND TEMPORALITIES OF TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES AND MIGRANT LIVES

We can grasp time in its complexity only if we seek the relations between time, temporality, tempo and timing, between clock time, chronology, social time and time-consciousness, between motion, process, change, continuity and the temporal modalities of past, present and future, between time as resource, as ordering principle and as becoming of the possible or between any combination of these (Adam 1990, 13).

On 23 November 2016 at noon, I was waiting anxiously on a delayed train to London Waterloo. I was on my way to a lunch meeting in central London with an informant, Sophia, whom I had never met before. Sophia and I had been put in touch by another informant who lived in Aberdeen, Scotland. Sitting in the stationary train, I anticipated I would be at least 15 minutes late and texted Sophia to apologise in advance.

The train starting moving again. As soon as I arrived at Waterloo station, I rushed down to the Underground to get on a tube. As the tube moved, the platform and the few people on it were all left behind. The internet signal on my mobile was lost. The tube was driven into a tunnel. Through the window, illuminated by the random strong lights in the tunnel, I saw old pipes and fuse boxes against the background of darkness. I heard the unpleasant sound of the high-pitched clickety-clack of the railcars over a stretch of track. It was in this dim light that I thought about the geographer David Harvey and his theory of time-space compression. Harvey's (1989) theory captures the ways in which modern technology, such as transportation, including the tube I was currently on, changes the qualities of and relationship between time and space, shortening distance between places, and enabling the acceleration of economic activities. He argues that advanced communication and transportation technologies facilitate the production, circulation, and exchange of capital at a pace faster than ever before. I thought for a second it is indeed this compression of social time-space that drives our globalised economies, and allows my informants (and me) to move geographically, temporally, socially,

and emotionally between two (and sometimes multiple) worlds - China/Hong Kong and the UK.

A few minutes later, natural light returned to my world. I came out from Baker Street Underground station, looking for my way to the restaurant with the help of the Google maps app on my mobile. Getting on and off the London Underground, and meeting informants at various locations, were part of my fieldwork experience in London. It was the tube that carried me from place to place and connected me with people whom I had never known. Doing two (and sometimes three) interviews a day meant that I had to manage my time precisely, in order to be punctual and keep track of my daily schedule. At 1pm, I would be sitting in a Chinese restaurant with my informant who originally came from Shanghai. At 4pm, I would be having a cup of Earl Grey tea at Starbucks with another informant who came from Hong Kong. I was constantly on the move, and so were my informants. One time, I conducted an interview on Skype with an informant who was at London Heathrow airport waiting for a flight to Leeds for a short business trip. As we could not finish the interview on that day, we continued the rest of it the next day when she was waiting for her return flight to London at Leeds Bradford airport. Time structures our movement. Time structures our lives.

## TIME, TEMPORALITY, MIGRATION AND LIFE-COURSE MOVEMENT

As people move, their experiences are closely related to time. Yet for a long time, our understanding of contemporary migration has been largely built upon theorisations of the spatial, with a lack of emphasis on time and temporality as a central analytical framework (Griffiths, Rogers, and Anderson 2013). Although the temporal dimensions of migration processes have not received equal attention to space and spatiality (May and Thrift 2001), there is a small but burgeoning sociological and anthropological literature focusing on the relationship between time and migration (e.g. Cwerner 2001; Roberts 1995; Robertson 2016; Meeus 2012). When analysing how time has been theorised and considered in migration studies, Griffiths, Rogers, and Anderson (2013) particularly look at five temporal conceptualisations: flows and moments; rhythms and cycles; tempos; synchronicity



and disjuncture; and the future. In this chapter, I attempt to employ some of these temporal categories to understand the youth mobilities of increasing numbers of well-educated and middle-class Chinese migrants to the UK.

The British visa regime is a structuring framework within which people have to operate according to the “time” constructed by the Home Office. In this study, Chinese migrants’ first visas typically allowed them to stay in the UK for between 18 months and 4 years, depending on the nature of the visa (study or youth mobility), and the length of the programme (for student-visa holders). Although young Chinese temporary migrants are expected to return to their country of origin or move on after a period of temporary residence in the UK, their intentions are tightly connected with the notion of an uncertain future, the looming spectre of which often entails a sense of precariousness, especially when combined with rhythmic changes in mobility (Marcu 2017). Being temporary, migrants’ duration of stay in the destination country changes over time (Bauböck 2011; Robertson 2018; Schrooten, Salazar, and Dias 2015), which necessitates a considerable degree of contingency and adjustments of expectations. This chapter responds to the call of Parreñas (2010, 319) to study how “temporal restrictions qualitatively shape migrant experiences”.

This chapter looks at the intersections between states’ disciplinary practices, enforced through the time constraints of the visa regime (Aybek 2014; Hammar 1990; Parreñas 2010), and the agency of migrants in combatting structural and temporal constraints (Baas 2010; Khoo, Hugo, and McDonald 2008; Robertson 2014). One of the significant means to lengthen the time remaining in the UK is marriage, for example by becoming: (1) a spouse/partner of a British permanent resident/citizen/EEA national; or (2) a dependant visa holder. Due to the nature of the transnational marriage market, which appears to follow the familiar logic of global hypergamy (Charsley and Shaw 2006; Constable 2003), and a lack of permanent and visa-sponsored employment opportunities in the UK (see chapter 2; Yu 2018), the status of ‘marriage migrant’ was realised by a greater number of migrant women than men following a period of temporary stay in the UK within my interview sample. This trend necessitates putting migrant women at the centre of this chapter. However, I will exceptionally include Ronald’s story to demonstrate how migrants’ experience of time changes as their goals in the UK change.

The sociological concept of time is particularly relevant to the understanding of life-course transitions. The life stages of migrant women have great implications for the timing of their life-course events, such as marriage (Cole 2010; Settersten and Mayer 1997), and reproduction (Constable 2013). King et al. (2004, 19) state that “the life course framework contextualises not only individual and group decisions about the timing of migrations but also the formative influences and outcomes”. I am aware that in some extreme yet rather common cases, migrants’ reproductive time is regulated by state bureaucracy, such as that of their destination country. For example, Filipina domestic helpers in Hong Kong may risk losing their job and being sent home if they become pregnant (Constable 2013). In this study, the British visa regime determines the duration of time that a temporary migrant is allowed to stay in the UK; the institution of marriage facilitates a social expectation to marry; and the Chinese state’s *sheng nu* discourse (discussed in the previous chapter) stigmatises women’s singlehood and directs them towards the goal of marriage before the age of 30. This chapter looks at how life-course time is structured, gendered, and influenced by the institution of marriage (Lauser 2008; Martin 2018; Kringelbach 2014; Thomas and Bailey 2009), and monitored by state bureaucracy.

Robertson (2018, 170) criticises migration sociology, which in her view, “has yet to grapple with the complex relationship between migrant temporality and migrant mobility, beyond life-course models or studies of migrants’ social and cultural temporalities”. In this chapter, I aim to address Robertson’s (2018, 170) criticism and to follow her approach of understanding migrants’ experiences by studying the overlaps and intersections of multiple “timescales” – institutional, biographic, and everyday. I will consider the institutional time of policy and governance, the biographic time of life-course events, and the everyday lived time of Chinese migrants, particularly related to their romantic relationships. This chapter aims to show how time is institutionalised. Time and temporality have implications for the making and breaking of transnational relationships, shaping desires, decisions, and the timing of transnational family formation among Chinese temporary migrants in the UK, which, as Cwerner (2001, 7) argues, “migrate” with people. I will investigate how the various modalities of socially constructed “time”, such as “individual time”, “historical time”, “state-controlled time”, “state-sponsored time”, and “gendered marriage/reproduction time”, are inter-related to produce specific experiences.

## FLOWS AND MOMENTS

According to Hareven (1982), most individuals' personal time should be understood in terms of their synchronisation with "historical time", which can be referred to as a specific time in history when major socio-economic, political, and cultural changes occur in a society. In mainland China, middle-class youths' individual time and family time are shaped by a particular historical time of unprecedented economic development and social change caused by major economic and social reforms, and implementation of the "one-child" birth control policy that began in the late 1970s. Urban women in China now enjoy a level of access to education equivalent to men's (Judd 1989; Evans 2008; Obendiek 2016), and other resources that were inaccessible to their parents' generation, including international migration opportunities.

In the case of Hong Kong, the expansion of tertiary education, lower rates of marriage, and fewer offspring in each Hong Kong family means that young middle-class children born in the post-1980s era benefit from a concentration of resources and investment from their family, which allows some to pursue foreign study and work opportunities.

**Table 3 Top five non-EU countries sending students to the UK**

Country	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14
China (PRC)	95,090	91,215	89,540	87,895
Malaysia	16,370	17,405	17,060	16,635
United States of America	17,580	17,115	16,865	16,485
India	16,550	16,745	18,320	19,750

Country	2016- 17	2015- 16	2014- 15	2013- 14
Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region)	16,680	16,745	16,215	14,725

Source: HESA Figure 11 - Top ten non-European Union countries of domicile in 2016/17 for HE student enrolments 2012/13 and 2016/17

Since migration flows are often conceptualised by academics, policymakers and immigration bureaucracies as sets of statistics that are collected at “snap shot” moments, we can only capture partial pictures of the numbers and movements of people at a particular period of time. As we can see from the figure above, the number of students coming to the UK for higher education from China and Hong Kong increased steadily during the period from 2013 to 2017. Although this figure illustrates the significant numbers of student migrants from mainland China and Hong Kong, despite the relatively small population size of the latter, it does not help to enrich our understanding of migrants’ lives in the UK.

In Chinese migrants’ narratives, certain “snap shot” moments are particularly significant, for example, the moment of arrival in the UK.

On 8<sup>th</sup> September 2012, I arrived in Edinburgh to pursue my master’s degree. I remember it being a very dark night. It was chilly.

*(Ling, 22 years old, married to a British citizen from Hong Kong)*

I arrived in London in the morning on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2015. My friend came to pick me up from the airport. I remember I had lots of luggage. We put it all on a trolley. The air was so fresh when I came out from the airport. The sky was grey. But the air was fresh. I was tired but excited. We got in a taxi to get to south London where I rented a room in a shared flat through my friend. I put the luggage in my room and went straight out to a bank to apply for a bank account. It was a very busy day!

*(Vivian, 28 years old, married to a British permanent resident from Hong Kong)*

I arrived in London on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2014. I remember it very clearly because I met my future husband on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2014, just a few days after my arrival! On that day, I was exploring the city centre on my own. My friend recommended I go to Leicester Square to have a look. I then walked

all the way from Leicester Square to Trafalgar Square. It was a sunny day. I was taking pictures. Just when I was about to leave and walk to Chinatown, my future husband appeared from nowhere and stopped me from leaving. He said to me, "I saw you taking pictures. You are so beautiful...would you like to have a smoothie with me?" And I did!

*(Belle, 24 years, married to an English PhD student)*

Many informants had clear memories of the specific details of their arrival day and regarded coming to the UK as a significant event in their lives. All informants could clearly state how long their visa was granted for; most remembered the exact expiry date of the visa. During interviews, some informants told me that when they thought of their old study and work lives "back home", they felt like it was the distant past, even though in reality, it had not been "that long". As they recalled their memories of departures, arrivals, home, and ageing parents, their travels and migration trajectories were packed with emotions. Certain memories were still fresh, but some seemed distant and blurred. In the migrants' narratives, their experiences of time change as their circumstances change. Of course, time does not go faster, slower or stop for such people, yet their narratives suggest that they experience a powerful sense of time accelerating or decelerating.

The following two pictures were taken by my informants Vivian and Winnie upon my request to record the day that they left the UK after a two-year working holiday.

## RHYTHMS AND CYCLES

Time is constantly on our minds. At this particular moment, we could all be thinking about when lunch time will be, how long we must wait until Christmas, or when the appropriate time will be for marriage, having children, or retirement. However, I argue that for temporary migrants, the weight of time on their minds can sometimes be heavier than for non-migrants because of their state of temporariness. Due to the limited time they were permitted to stay in the UK, many informants were acutely aware of the passage of time, which shaped their present behaviours and decision-making processes. For example, Ronald talked about how his temporal experience changed as his desire to stay in the UK grew. He said,

When I first arrived in the UK, I was just enjoying my student life. I was very naïve and too relaxed. I didn't think much about my future. I thought if I

wanted to stay, I could stay. When I was in the first year of my undergraduate programme, I thought I could simply find a job at McDonald's to stay here after I graduated. It was after I became a second-year student that I realised staying on in the UK wasn't easy at all. I started to do lots of research. Then I learnt that it wouldn't be easy for me to get a work visa with my social science degree. I panicked because I didn't want to leave. I couldn't sleep for many nights. I was under so much stress. Every day I thought hard to look for some ways to stay on. I knew I had to find a way quickly because I was running out of time and I was going to graduate soon. I kept thinking the clock was ticking; every moment, every day, I thought of this. I was very sensitive about time. I would be anxious when I thought to myself that another day had passed.

This transformation of Ronald's emotional trajectory from being a relaxed student migrant to an anxious "would-be indefinite settler" represents a change of rhythm in his migration journey. Although at the time of our first interview in March 2016, Ronald still had at least one and a half years left until his visa expired, there was a sense of urgency in finding a way to prolong his stay before his time in the UK ran out. In last chapter, I discussed how Ronald strategised his chance of achieving an extended stay through sexual and romantic relationships. Here I want to emphasise how Ronald made use of his temporal capital to try to achieve his goal. As discussed in chapter 2, migrants' temporal capital is significant in determining how successful they would be in extending their stays in the UK.

In chapter 4, I described how Ronald claimed that he chatted with at least 200 people through dating apps and spent a minimum of four hours per day on these apps. Even though Ronald spent a lot of time using dating apps, he was very positive about this use of time, which allowed him to explore new sexual experiences and helped him to find his ex-partner, with whom he ended up living for more than two years and who was supportive of his quest to stay on in the UK. Ronald's experience of utilising his time to explore romantic opportunities resonates with the stories of other informants, especially women (for examples, refer to chapter 4).

#### GENDERING OF WOMEN'S AGE AND "MARRYING ON SCHEDULE"

In many Asian societies, both men and women, but especially women, are expected to enter marriage. In a study of South Indian international students' mobility. Yakaboski, Sheridan, and Dade (2014, 53) found that temporary migration to the US

helped both men and women to put a “time-stop on their marriage clocks”. In his/her study concerning middle-class Chinese women students in Australia, Martin (2018) found that a temporary stay overseas represented a “zone of suspension” within women’s life-courses, which helped them to delay marrying and child-bearing, and even potentially renegotiate normative life-course scripts. Although migration may allow a temporary deferral of gendered expectations, very few Chinese women that I interviewed perceived that marriage and motherhood could be left out of their life plan completely. Rather, the majority of migrant women considered international migration to be a significant life-course event that in itself creates “pathways” for them to fulfil “different [individual and family] roles sequentially or simultaneously” (Elder 1977). Many had hoped to achieve the goal of marriage at a time that they set for themselves based on pre-migration social and cultural values. However, as this chapter will show, restrictive British immigration regulations may sometimes come into conflict with migrants’ desires for family formation and the maintenance of transnational relations.

In chapter 4, I discussed how young Chinese migrant women following a conventional feminine life script are under pressure to marry as they approach the age of 30. This social expectation on women to adopt a family-focused identity is intensified by the state-sponsored gender discourse of *sheng nu*, which stigmatises women’s singlehood. Previously I have argued that the gender discourse of *sheng nu* has travelled across borders through media, such as TV shows, and social media, and shape not only mainland Chinese women, but also Hong Kong women’s view of the *right* timing of marriage. Here, I will present Karmen, a 31-year-old former nurse from Hong Kong, to discuss how the combined forces of the social expectation to marry and the gendering of age work together to shape women’s desire for and timing of marriage during their supposedly “temporary” migration trajectory. In the face of running out of visa time and passing the prime age bracket to secure a marriage, Karmen was keen to search for a partner in the UK whom she could “settle down with”. She said,

Men is definitely an issue. I am over 30 years old now. I think all the normal men in their 30s in Hong Kong have already married. But I can’t find anyone whom I can settle down with. I don’t even mind having a husband who is previously divorced, but still it is not easy... I know I am a bit old now because this is what everyone said to me. They said it is time for me to find

someone and settle down. In Hong Kong, it is fine for a 50-year-old man to date a woman in her 20s. It is not an issue at all. But what about women in their 30s? Where is my market? I think that in the UK, a woman's age is less of a big deal. People don't judge you so harshly here...I want to meet someone here and get married. I don't have much time left.

Karmen was aware that she was treated unfairly by gender double standards related to age and marriage. Age hypergamy is a common phenomenon observed in many Chinese societies (Ji 2015), which suggests the social norm of marriage formed between younger brides and older grooms has remained unchallenged. Although the average age at first marriage has risen steadily in the post-1980 era in both Hong Kong and cities in mainland China due to the expansion of higher education, and the highly competitive global environment and job market, women, as compared to men, continue to have a more compressed time frame to complete the rigidly defined normative life stages. This is especially significant because after spending years in tertiary (and post-graduate) education and accumulating work experience, single urban Chinese women in their late twenties and early thirties may experience great disadvantages in the marriage market.

Lahad (2013) argues that there exists a temporal aspect in relation to societal timetables and age norms that women are expected to follow. This temporal aspect, I argue, relates to the notion of temporal capital. In the earlier stages of singlehood, women who are still considered as young, thus holding temporal capital, are admired and praised for their self-determination and personal endeavour to succeed. However, when marriageable age is approaching, or worse, passed, singlehood becomes a "problem", a "feminized temporal crisis" (Negra 2009, cited in Lahad 2013, 26) for those who are perceived to be no longer having youth as capital or advantage on their side. As Lahad suggests, single women beyond the age of 30 are often criticised as being too choosy, and "asking for too much", thus bringing failure upon themselves. This echoes Karmen's admission that she did not mind having a husband who is a divorcee; in other words, she was not choosy. Women like Karmen are at a socio-temporal phase where their entitlement to hold a selective stance is lost, and they are expected to compromise in order to achieve the goal of marriage.

I argue that young migrant women's concern about ageing in relation to the prospect of marriage and family formation is shaped by gendered marriage and reproduction



“times”. Even those who have not reached their thirties, such as Belle, may still hope to follow the fixed and divided chronological phases of study, post-study work, marriage, and reproduction in a feminine life-course model (Martin 2018). Belle’s decision to marry Chris, a 25-year-old PhD student from England, was shaped by her understanding of the “best timing” of reproduction for women. She said,

I told Chris that I wanted to get married and give birth at a young age. My mum gave birth to me quite late. I don’t want to follow in her footsteps. Also, as an only child myself, I want to have 2 children. I think it will be good to give birth to my first one at the age of 28. And then maybe at the age of 30, I can give birth to my second one. I sometimes think of my aunt. I think she gave birth too late at the age of 36. Now she doesn’t have energy to play with her kid and looks really tired and old all the time.

Belle’s view of women’s limited window of reproduction time, which should ideally be positioned after marriage but before the age of 30, was echoed in statements by many other informants, including those who had not achieved the social ideal, who often pointed out that having children beyond the age of 30 may entail significant health risks, compromised quality of nurturing time, and delayed retirement plans. This deeply rooted and pervasive discourse sets the timing of marriage and reproduction, and directs women towards the goal of what I term “marrying on schedule”. This is particularly significant for temporary migrant women who hope to follow their goal-driven normative life script, and seek committed relationships with a view to marriage whilst in the UK.

## TEMPO

### NEGOTIATING MARRIAGE IN ACCELERATED AND DECELERATED TIME

Vivian met John, a 35-year-old British citizen from Hong Kong, one year after she moved to London. At the time of our first interview in March 2016, the couple had been together for several months and had started to consider marrying. But Vivian’s temporary residency status put a time frame on this relationship, and imposed challenges to planning for future. She said,

We are running out of time because of my visa. My boyfriend is always worried about our future. He wonders whether I would ever return to the

UK again after my visa expires, and whether we would stop loving each other if we live apart. I sometimes think maybe we should give up now before we become too attached to each other. But then, another voice inside my heart says perhaps we should just get married so that we can be together forever.

Vivian's statement illustrates the difficulty of maintaining a committed relationship under a running-out-of-time visa situation. Soon after our first interview, Vivian moved in with John, shifting her life focuses from work and traveling to negotiating a relationship that would ultimately lead to marriage, and planning for a permanent future in the UK. Considering her age and her desired life script, she saw marrying John as a "logical" step, which on the one hand, would allow her to remain in the UK and the relationship to grow without worrying about disruptions; on the other hand, would improve her employability by attaining a more permanent residency status. However, Vivian also considered the costs of entering into a transnational marriage, for example extending a supposedly temporary separation with her family in Hong Kong. This internal struggle, together with the experience of negotiating the possibility of marriage, is what I call the "process of marriage negotiation".

After the expiration of her visa in early 2017, Vivian returned to Hong Kong, after which the couple maintained a long-distance relationship, with discussions about marrying in the future already having taken place. At the time, Vivian's actions, plans, and considerations, including exploring job opportunities in Hong Kong, revolved around her romantic relationship and ongoing marriage negotiation. For example, she specifically found a recruitment job to build up her credentials for a future career in London. However, when only one month into the job the long working hours posed a threat to her relationship, she resigned immediately. Speaking over the phone at the time, she said to me,

You know, this really is the best time to do it [leave the job]. I don't like this job. I guess I'm just not recruitment agent material. My original plan was to visit John at Christmas this year. But we both miss each other a lot. I feel like I can't take it any longer. When I can't have a face-to-face talk with him, I just don't know what he is thinking. It's easy to have misunderstandings and arguments. I'd rather see him now than wait any longer.

Soon afterwards, Vivian returned to the UK with tourist status, allowing her to stay in the country for six months without the right to work. Relying on financial support from John and her own family to cover her living expenses, Vivian was able to

completely focus on her relationship. I met the couple at an Italian restaurant in Edinburgh in August 2017 when they were on a trip to the Scottish Highlands. They appeared to be cheerful, but Vivian was still anxiously waiting for John's marriage proposal. As her time in the UK drew to a close in November 2017, Vivian returned to Hong Kong empty-handed. Having been separated again and after several more serious discussions, John proposed over the phone two months later. In late 2018, Vivian travelled back to the UK with a spouse visa after getting married in Hong Kong.

Vivian's story highlights the intense, on-going, and time-compressed process of marriage negotiation between temporary migrant women and their partners in the UK. Since such negotiation is subjected to the temporal and spatial dynamics of migration regimes, often only a limited time is allowed for transnational couples to think and decide for their futures. This accelerated sense of time, with a desperate panicked rush of trying to make the "best" relationship decision, was experienced by many other informants. However, when individuals fail to make the quick, almost impulsive, decision to marry, the process of marriage negotiation is likely to continue across state boundaries. For nearly two years, Vivian had, as she described, "lived in both worlds", traveling between two places and living with the marital status of a woman waiting for her partner's marriage proposal, and facing the risk of losing valuable time in career building and finding another marriageable partner, if this relationship did not work out. In Vivian's case, her middle-class family background indeed supported her travels between the UK and Hong Kong, enabling her to give up her job in Hong Kong and return to the UK for six months as a tourist without income. This demonstrates a close relationship between one's class background and the amount of temporal capital that he/she owns before he/she must become financially self-sustained.

For some migrants, a potentially lengthy process of cross-border marriage negotiation entails even more risks and uncertainties. Belle said,

Before we decided to get married, Chris told me that he would come to Hong Kong once he graduates. He asked me to spend a year in Hong Kong to wait for him. But I felt like one year was too long, and even one month was too long for things to change. I have confidence in our relationship, but not in time.

Belle's statement illustrates how time is imagined as something that is uncontrollable, and how the time of separation and waiting is considered as a "threat" to a relationship, undermining its stability. In contrast to the *acceleration* of time experienced by migrants as they seek a sense of certainty in their relationship before their visas expire, waiting for a relationship decision to be made, especially when a transnational couple lives apart, is imagined and experienced as a *deceleration* of time. Waiting is considered as a blockage of action (Gasparini 1995), a suspension of time that jeopardises migrants' relationship, and puts their future in a negative light.

Lin Lin met her husband Tian Qi while they were both studying for master's degrees at a university in northern England. Midway through their studies, Tian Qi switched onto a PhD programme at the same university. Since Lin Lin's length of study was now shorter than her boyfriend's, she had to leave the UK first. She considered the separation to be too long for her to wait in China whilst Tian Qi pursued his degree. In order to join him again, and justifying her decision to herself as an opportunity to improve her employability in the UK, Lin Lin enrolled in a second master's programme at a different British university after the first master's degree was completed. When she was about to complete her second master's degree and her visa was about to expire, Lin Lin and Tian Qi returned to China to register their marriage. After the wedding, Tian Qi completed his remaining two years of PhD studies in the UK, while Lin Lin was left alone in China to complete a visa application as a Tier 4 dependant, which unfortunately had taken 10 months, much longer than she had expected. She said,

It was a very long and painful process. I had to apply for the visa twice during these 10 months because I failed it the first time... The first time when I applied, they said I had insufficient evidence to prove our relationship is genuine. Then I applied for an administrative review. I submitted our WeChat conversations and travel documents to prove that we have been in a long-term relationship for years. But in the review, they still thought that our relationship is not a genuine one, so my application was declined. When I applied for the second time, they said we did not have sufficient funding. But this was in fact a mistake because they forgot to count the money that my spouse had in his UK bank account. After I applied for administrative review again, they issued the visa to me.

She continued,

When I was waiting in China, I didn't work for 10 months. My family and friends were worried. They thought I was wasting my time. They compared me with people similar to my age and thought that my career progress was a bit slow.

Lin Lin felt that time was decelerated as she was stuck, unable to return to the UK, and unable to develop a career in either the UK or China. Like Vivian, Lin Lin could choose not to work for an extended period of time due to the existence of the middle-class family network and resources that she could fall back on. When the visa was finally granted, Lin Lin was only given a one-year stay in the UK because Tian Qi's PhD programme was close to finishing. This loss of valuable time had made it difficult for Lin Lin to secure a long-term or permanent job, leaving her with no other options but ongoing temporary work in the UK. As a dependant equipped with two master's degrees, Lin Lin failed to turn either time or cultural capital into advantages in the labour market.

Time-related visa regulations have great implications for the timing of marriage of both newly arrived migrants and those who have lived in the UK for a long period of time. Cher moved to Wales from Hong Kong in 2005 to attend boarding school and prepare for her O-level exams. She then studied for a Fashion Design degree at a university in London. Despite living in the UK for more than a decade, however, Cher was unable to obtain British permanent residency through the ten-year immigration path because of too many days of absence<sup>22</sup>. At the same time, she was unable to secure visa-sponsored employment following graduation. This situation forced her to consider the option of marrying her Korean boyfriend, a Tier 2 visa holder, with whom she had been in a relationship for three and a half years. This marriage allowed Cher to continue living in London as a dependent family member and to count the time spent in the UK towards either the five-year or the ten-year immigration path, which would eventually give her British permanent residency.

Cher's decision to marry was made with lots of worries in mind because she was never sure that her husband was a compatible partner. During their years of courtship, Cher was aware of her partner's bad temper and "Korean machismo".

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<sup>22</sup> The ten-year permanent residency path requires migrants to have had continuous residence in the UK, with gaps of no more than 180 days at a time, and no more than 540 days in a ten-year period (see Home Office 2019c).

However, her partner's positive changes over a six-month period and her own concerns about her visa situation finally persuaded her to get married in January 2016. The couple's married life had not been as happy as Cher had hoped. Soon after they were married, her husband's "bad habits and bad temper" had returned, and were worse than before. His visa-sponsored job in London was stressful, and according to Cher, her husband was "the kind of man who accumulates all his negative emotions during day-time work, and vents it out on his wife when he gets home". Cher's husband now thought that moving back to South Korea would be the best option for his career development, and expected Cher to follow. But London had become Cher's home for over ten years, and she did not want to have to adapt to a new life in South Korea. She was worried that because of her incompetence in the Korean language, she would not be able to find any jobs and end up being a full-time housewife. Cher was angry at her husband's sudden change of plan. When reflecting on her decision to marry, she said,

Moving to South Korea is not what we agreed before I said yes to his marriage proposal...Getting married at the time wasn't good timing as I always felt we were not ready for it, but then again, I didn't have other options.

#### "LIGHTNING MARRIAGE"

Vivian, Belle, Lin Lin, and Cher's decisions to marry and timing of marriage were shaped, and often accelerated by various factors, including visa-time constraints, the social pressure to marry, their own understandings of the "appropriate marriage time", and the desired outcomes of such marriages, such as the right to live in the UK. To a certain extent, Vivian's, Belle's, and Lin Lin's marriages can be described as *shanhun*, a popular Chinese term that can be directly translated as "lightning marriage". It is generally used to describe a couple who get married after knowing each other or being together for a short period of time. There is no universal understanding of how "short" a time a couple must have been together before the wedding for it to be called a "lightning marriage". However, in general, Chinese marriages are viewed not only as a matter involving two individuals, but also as a bond formed between two families, which may take a couple of years to build.

In a way, “lightning marriage” is similar to the term “shotgun wedding” used in a western context, which also means a hurried wedding. However, while an unexpected pregnancy is usually involved in a “shotgun wedding”, such an event is only one of the reasons, but not the determining factor, contributing to a “lightning marriage” in the Chinese context. Rather, the gendering of ages and the social pressure surrounding women’s singlehood may be more likely to facilitate such marriages.

Since *shanhun* challenges the conformist ideal that marriage should be formed after establishing a stable and long-term courtship, both men and women engaging in *shanhun* risk losing social respectability, with women tending to risk losing more than men if a *shanhun* turns into a divorce.

Here, I want to introduce Ying’s story. Unlike the migrant women I have discussed so far, Ying was married before she came to the UK. Ying represents my other informants who got married in their countries of origin at a specific time for the purpose of bringing their spouse to the UK. This kind of marriage is considered an effective way for couples to obtain temporary visas and move to the UK together. It usually happens not long before a migrant’s designated departure time.

Ying is now a divorcee. Ying and her ex-husband, a civil servant, were in a relationship for three years in China before they got married in their mid-twenties in July 2015. During these years, although the couple lived together for a short period of time, for most of the time they lived separately and only saw each other occasionally. Their decision to marry was triggered by Ying’s acceptance onto the PhD programme of a British university. Within two months of the offer being confirmed, Ying was married. She thought that by getting married and acquiring her husband a dependant visa, she was “helping him to fulfil his dream”. However, this goal-oriented marriage was in fact formed without adequate communication and mutual understanding between the couple, and bonding between the two families. Ying recalled the first time her ex-husband visited her family, and she said,

In spring 2015, my ex-husband came to my house to visit my parents and grandparents for the first time. Even though it was such an important event, he didn’t bring good and expensive gifts. He brought only some cheap gifts and I had to take him to the local shopping mall to buy more. This left my family with a very bad first impression. Later on, he bought me an

engagement ring and wedding rings. But we didn't wear the rings a lot. We just got married. We didn't have a wedding banquet. We didn't even take wedding photos. His mother wanted to buy me some gold as a wedding present. But I said no. I got the marriage certificate only because I wanted to get him a visa. If it wasn't because of this, I wouldn't want to get married at all. I was very against the idea of marriage from the bottom of my heart...My parents had never met his parents. I think his mum made a phone call to my mum once. As far as I remember, that was the only time.

Ying arrived in the UK in October 2015 and was soon busy with her new life of study. The couple rented a small apartment in a small town in the middle of England. Ying expected her husband to look for jobs and study English at home, while she attended classes and studied in the university library. It was a stressful time for Ying. She said,

I was very unhappy. I had never seen him studying. I had never seen him making any notes. I helped him to find lots of materials and books for studying English from my university library. But he didn't even read it. He said to me he wanted to become an I.T. programmer in the UK and design something to show prospective employers what he was capable of. Since he arrived, he seemed to be busy designing this programme. But I didn't know what exactly he was doing. He didn't apply for any jobs. He didn't study English at all. He just stayed at home. I was very upset. Every day he woke up very late, like after ten o'clock or something. He was not motivated. He was just lazy. I had to make breakfast and lunch for him. I did all the weekly food shopping. I did all the housework. But before we moved here, he said he would take care of me! I was actually not a good cook before I moved here, but still I made three meals for him every day. I left half of the lunch for him and took another half to university. The place we rented was very small. There was not enough space for two people. If he was in the flat, I would go to university to study. Sometimes when I left for university, he would still be in bed.

After four months of living together in the UK, the couple broke up. Ying said,

My ex-husband said to me, "I wouldn't have wanted to get married that early if it wasn't for the fact that you pushed me!" I can't believe he blamed me for bringing him to the UK!

For informants such as Ying and her ex-husband, getting married is a migration strategy that requires the least resources to achieve the best results in the fastest manner. Undoubtedly, Ying and her ex-husband had the choice not to rush into marriage just because it could open a door to transnational migration. They took the chance and realised that they could not carry on after moving abroad. Getting married for the acquisition of a dependant visa is considered to be a strategic move



that allows a student migrant to obtain cultural capital; and his or her partner to accumulate overseas work experience, and even better, to find a visa-sponsored job. If the dependant visa holder is able to obtain a work visa through employment, the student visa holder is likely to become a dependant on his or her partner's work visa upon graduation. And in some cases, if a student visa holder successfully finds a visa-sponsored job, this will allow his or her partner to continue living in the UK as a dependant. Even if both migrants have no choice but to return to their countries of origin when their visas expire, they are still equipped with foreign study and work experience, which make them more valuable in the local job market. At first glance, there seem to be few potential losses in this migration strategy. However, Ying and her ex-husband's story shows that the situation is not so simple. In Ying's narrative, she had to bear greater consequences and social pressure as a divorcee. She was aware that her values and attractiveness in the marriage market had now decreased.

Although the pace of development in a relationship and the decision to marry may be shaped and often accelerated by migrants' visa-time conditions, the legitimacy of migrant women's marriages in both social and immigration contexts is still largely determined by whether they and their partner have been together for an "acceptable" length of time prior to marriage.

Many migrant women were aware that the duration of courtship influences how their marriage is perceived. For example, Ling Ling was a 22-year-old student-turned-spouse migrant, who deliberately waited six months in China after the expiration of her student visa before marrying a British citizen from Hong Kong. She talked about the cautious attitude of her parents in response to her intention to marry after being in a short courtship. She said,

My parents were a bit worried about me getting married after being in a relationship for a year only. They said to me, "Come back to China first after finishing your master's degree. Let the relationship cool down a bit. We will see if this man still treats you the same when you two are apart."

Similarly, after a short courtship with an EU national living in the UK, Mei Mei got married at the age of 28, having recently completed her master's degree. Instead of feeling excited to share the news of her engagement, Mei Mei was ambivalent about

how such news would be perceived by her family and her husband's family, especially because the relationship was only a year old. She said,

My husband first said to me that he wanted to marry me three months before my visa expired. I told my mum immediately. She was shocked. And then she said she had to come to the UK and take a look at him...I was a bit worried that my husband's family may think I only married him for the visa. But luckily, they didn't think like that.

Time is an inextricable part of the way migrants' marriages are evaluated by migrants themselves and their family and friends. For example, in Mei Mei's case, she was aware of the stereotypes and social sceptics concerning transnational marriages, and marriages formed after a short courtship in general. Even though cultural understandings of marriage vary across countries, the cultural logic of time in evaluating and legitimising the authenticity of a marriage or relationship is deeply embedded not only in Chinese, but also the Euro-American cultural context. In the UK, in order for a non-EEA partner to qualify for a family visa under the unmarried partnership route, a couple needs to meet the requirement of a minimum two-year period of cohabitation (UK Visas and Immigration 2012). The Home Office may suspect that the marriage is a sham, meaning two people enter into a marriage or civil partnership for immigration advantage, if a couple's conditions do not conform to dominant institutional and societal perceptions of a good and acceptable marriage (Pellander 2015; Satzewich 2014; Wray 2006). In general, couples who have spent insufficient time together before and after marriage will raise a red flag in the eyes of immigration bureaucrats.

The dilemma of hoping for a marriage to be formed spontaneously due to long-term and sophisticated romantic love, which is widely expected and praised by both Chinese and British societies, and having to consider marrying in a hurried way due to visa-time constraints, often created a feeling of unease among my informants. Mei Mei's story illustrates the struggles migrant women face, caught between different social expectations and models of "time".

## CONCLUSION: INTERSECTING MODELS OF TIME

The main findings discussed in this chapter relate to the experiences of young, well-educated Chinese temporary migrants in the UK whose migration trajectories, romantic relationships, and life-course decisions are shaped by the complex relations between the various modalities of socially constructed “time”, and the intersections of multiple “timescales” – institutional, biographic, and everyday.

Young Chinese women’s timing and opportunity to engage in temporary migration to the UK is conditioned by a specific “historical time” (Hareven 1982). Due to the economic prosperity of China and Hong Kong in recent decades, many Chinese families are able to amass capital and send their offspring overseas to accumulate cultural capital and work experience. Whilst pursuing their study-and-work related goals, young single Chinese migrant women in their twenties and early thirties may also desire romantic opportunities, despite their limited time in the UK.

Being at this particular life stage, some young single Chinese women from a middle-class background explore romance, and even marriage opportunities, partly due to their own desires, and partly due to the long-existing age hypergamy, which has been further consolidated by the state-sponsored gender discourse of *sheng nu* (leftover women). This gendering of ages directs women towards the goal of marriage by the age of 30, a phenomenon I call “gendered marriage time”. As a popular Chinese saying goes, *nanren sanshi yi duo hua, nuren sanshi lan zhazha* (men at 30 are like a flower, women at 30 are wilted and rotten); women, as compared to men, are considered to have a much shorter window of time to remain desirable in the marriage market. Chinese women’s “gendered marriage time” is also a form of “state-sponsored time”, which gives women a rigid timeline to follow to complete the goals of marriage and reproduction for the purpose of achieving demographic targets. This puts enormous pressure on women to find a partner before they get “too old”, to “marry on schedule”, and to have children according to gendered reproduction time.

Informants who were not influenced by this social pressure to marry were those who were already married before migration, such as Ying. For these migrants, the

biographic time of life-course events was shaped largely by their migration opportunity, and the advantage of bringing their spouse to the UK.

Single migrant women's goals in romance and their relationships in the UK may come into conflict with a state agenda that aims to ensure that migrants' stays are only temporary through what I refer as "state-controlled time": the institutional time of policy and governance that limits the length of legally permitted stays. The temporal reality and visa-time constraints (Robertson and Runganaikaloo 2013) shape the everyday lived time of Chinese migrants, and contribute to the difficulty of maintaining relationships, especially when their futures are highly uncertain. Many informants in a committed relationship felt that they had to start the "marriage talk" early and enter the process of marriage negotiation in a time-compressed situation. This accelerated sense of time is experienced by migrants who urgently hope to make a relationship decision before the expiration of visas. In some cases, such negotiations may continue across borders when transnational couples live apart. If this happens, maintaining a long-distance relationship that leads to marriage, and preparing for return to the UK, including building career credentials that may be useful in the British labour market, become the focus of migrants' lives. However, due to their relationship commitment and frequent travel to the UK, these women may risk losing jobs and income stability, and valuable time in finding another marriageable partner, if the prospect of marriage cannot be materialised.

Due to the interplay of visa-time restrictions and the pressure to marry in the Chinese social context, "lightning marriages" may be formed between migrant women and their partners in the UK. The duration of time that a couple has been together before entering marriage shapes the way the relationship is perceived in social and immigration contexts. "Lightning marriages" arouse social concerns because they entail a sense of a lack of maturity and sophistication. Chinese temporary migrant women who marry a partner in the UK without spending adequate time together as a couple may be perceived with further social suspicion, and be subjected to stereotyping by immigration bureaucrats and women's own social networks, including their husband's family. In the next chapter, I will discuss Chinese migrant women's empowerment, which they achieve through maintaining their class identity and their quest for respectable femininity, despite the perceived

negative connotations of transnational, and particularly interracial marriage by my informants.

## CHAPTER 6

### BECOMING RESPECTABLE

It was a cold winter afternoon in 2016 when I first met Kelly, whose wedding was described in the prologue of this thesis. We had arranged to have lunch at a Thai restaurant in Edinburgh. As I arrived early and had never met her before, I chose the seats facing the window so that I could see each person walking past the restaurant. I saw a girl who walked past; she wore a red hat, a dark green dress with black leggings, and a black coat. The girl immediately caught my attention because her outfit seemed to be a bit out of place. To my mind, this girl was definitely not a local in Edinburgh. Winter outfits in Scotland are generally dark in colour; her red and green seemed to be too colourful. She was, indeed, my informant Kelly, a Chinese student migrant in her early twenties. After we became friends, I asked her out of curiosity about her outfit on that day. She said, “I used to wear something even more colourful because I think colourful branded clothes are classy in China”. She reflected that after she came to the UK, she became “humbler” and “less extravagant”. She told me she was “learning the British way”. Kelly’s statement seems to resonate with David’s observation, noted in chapter 2, about the British class system, which in his eyes, is completely different from the one he comes from because it is based not only on income but also on manners. As a new migrant, Kelly hoped to be considered as belonging to a respectable class in the UK. This is indeed not a straightforward and easy process, as it requires migrants to review, question, challenge, and give new meanings to their own ideas about class and respectability; and to adjust their class position according to their place of residence and stage in the life cycle.

As one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class, respectability is “usually the concern of those who are not seen to have it” Skeggs (2002, 2). It is one of the primary aspects of what it means “to belong, to be worthy and to be an individual” (ibid., 3). Skeggs discusses an English notion of “respectability”, which she sees as a property of the middle-class. Respectable femininity is a form of symbolic capital that women seek in order to gain symbolic profit and class status. Normative

conceptions of respectable femininity in Chinese societies involve women identifying themselves through domesticity and caring roles, and “traditional” feminine virtues [for example Heng and Devan’s (1995) work on Singaporean Chinese women).

Respectable masculinity and respectable femininity are relational concepts. John Osburg’s (2013) book describes how wealthy men in mainland China pursue respectability by having a “proper” wife at home, who is from a good family background and confined to the domestic sphere, and keeping unofficial “second wives” (*bao ernai*), mistresses or lovers, who are considered as more attractive, having the social graces and cultural sophistication to accompany the wealthy men while entertaining, but not from a good background. Osburg also explains while “proper” wives criticise the women who their husbands have sexual relationships with as lacking quality (*suzhi*), these women claim respectability by showing off their beauty and ability to secure material comfort. *Suzhi* here forms a moral distinction. Women from good family background own cultural capital that they use to distance themselves from women from the lower classes, whom they perceive as reduced to pure materialism. I will return to this point of moral distinction later.

Women’s ever-increasing participation in education and the labour force, and the normalisation of dual-income households, has contributed to an additional burden on women to negotiate status and power within the household and society at large. Women’s life choices are complicated by new models of successful femininity and contradictory role demands in which women today are required to carefully manage their own biographies and simultaneously achieve professional and personal successes, particularly in marriage and parenthood [see Ang 2016; and also Purushotam 1998 for a discussion of how middle-class Singaporean women are expected by the state to be “working mothers” – both reproductive (of children) and economically productive].

This chapter explores women’s struggle in navigating respectable femininity as an individual and a family member in both their countries of origin and destination. It looks at the tensions experienced by migrants in the process of negotiating respectable femininity in the UK. One set of tensions involves middle-class migrants’ acquisition of different forms of capital that they believe are related to their respectability, such as institutionalised cultural capital, i.e. a postgraduate degree

from a British university; economic capital, such as a house in the UK; and symbolic capital, for example a work visa or a job at a transnational company (see chapter 2 for a discussion of class and capital). All these different forms of capital may be coded and valued differently in the UK, mainland China and Hong Kong. A second set of tensions concerns the ways in which my informants think that their acquisitions or aspirations will be interpreted by their parents, friends, and society at large.

Despite Chinese middle-class women's desire to achieve both respectability and security through marriage, marriage itself is often a two-edged weapon in their transnational lives. All the women in this chapter were either engaged or married at the time of the research. They had chosen to marry in part because of pressures (and personal desires) not to remain single, in part because of affection for their partner, and in part because they wanted access to the assets, respectability and security that marriage can (potentially) bring.

To begin with, it is important to understand the paradoxes that transnational marriage migrants find themselves in, and how these paradoxes are further complicated by migrants' own contradictory perceptions of marriage immigration as a migration strategy. Transnational marriage migration is often imagined as an old-fashioned way for migrants, particularly women, to achieve upward mobility or "marry up" (Constable 2003; 2005; Lauser 2008). The term "global hypergamy" (Constable 2005) describes a hierarchical order of countries in the aspect of transnational marriage. For example, a bride hailing from a developing country could be considered as "lower" on the scale than her husband who hails from a developed country. The bride could consequently be seen as "marrying up" based solely on her country of origin. However, according to Lauser (2008, 102), the notion of "marrying up" entails a number of paradoxes. She notes,

We need to look precisely how, for whom and in what sense such marriages represent upward mobility. The fact that social mobility in a transnational marriage is based on the economic disparities between the countries of the bride and groom and do not always correspond to the social position or education of the individuals involved, patterns of marital mobility entail a number of dynamics between different categories including those of nationality, ethnicity, gender, geography and class. In Germany, for example, a middle-class household with only one (male) breadwinner normally cannot afford a housekeeper whereas in the Philippines, the



corresponding situation is unthinkable without several domestic helpers. Assuming that such marriages are simply upward mobility for the Filipina means overlooking different kinds of contradictory social and economic patterns between the origin and destination countries.

These paradoxes can also be observed in the marriages of young Chinese migrant women in the UK. In particular, I look at such women's marriages to two types of men: (1) a British partner with a Chinese background (for example, a British-born Chinese, or a British citizen from China or Hong Kong, who is a relatively new migrant); and (2) a non-Chinese partner. I explore how women's self-perceived class identities shape these marriage choices, and how they negotiate power and adjust expectations within their marriages. The interplay of class, ethnicity, and gender forms interlocking systems of power that impact those who marry a non-Chinese partner. For Chinese women who marry a British partner with a Chinese or Hong Kong background, although they share the same ethnicity as their partner, they are aware of the power dynamics and tensions in spousal relationships due to cultural differences and inequalities created by the web of gender, class, and immigration systems, which puts them in an inferior position in terms of employment opportunities, residency status, and social networks, compared to their partner in the UK. Two of my mainland Chinese informants who were marrying Hong Kong citizens told me that they thought their in-laws from Hong Kong looked down upon them because of their mainland origin.

Class, marriage, and family are interrelated. Class is not just about individuals' social attributes but also their family resources. Class is embedded in migrants' choices in marriage and family formation, in which migrants' existing family has a role to play, for example to approve or disapprove of such relationships, and to provide or not provide practical help or financial assistance to the young couple. Traditionally, compatible family backgrounds between the bride and the groom is considered a major principle of marriage formation in Chinese societies. In fact, it is not only Chinese people who tend to meet and identify with a potential spouse of the same class. In capitalist societies, such as the UK and the US, the different forms of capital and resources that a singleton possesses or values are also important in shaping who and where potential couples meet, and what they think they have in common or can offer each other.

Most of the women in this study were born into a middle-class or a relatively privileged family in China or Hong Kong. When these women form a transnational relationship or marriage in the UK, especially with a non-Chinese, they may find it hard to evaluate how “compatible” they are in terms of their respective social and economic positions due to the “contradictory social and economic patterns” that Lauser (2008) describes, between the women’s country of origin and that of their British or EU partner.

The migrant women in this study often experienced emotional dilemmas in negotiating their own and their family’s expectations, especially when these expectations are entangled with the dynamic of marital mobility that is created by the interrelations of nationality, ethnicity, gender, geography, and class. Class and respectability, and their relation to marital mobility, are the main focus of this chapter.

Why does being a “compatible” couple in terms of social and economic standing matter to the young Chinese migrant women? Hypergamy may work as an advantage for women, but why was the transnational relationship or marriage of the women in this study not always approved of by their family? How does family capital, especially in the forms of the purchase of property and the provision of financial assistance, empower migrant women but at the same time harm their respectability? I ask these questions only in this last chapter of the thesis because in order to answer them, it is necessary to refer back to the individual chapters which examine migrants’ motivations and expectations, and how they navigate their lives in the UK. As my other chapters have shown so far, young Chinese migrants are often expected by their parents to become “successful” through the achievement of educational and career goals. At the same time, the majority of middle-class women informants, who were in their early twenties to early thirties, considered having a “good” marriage as an integral part of being a successful individual. This chapter will examine the ways middle-class Chinese women negotiate respectability through marriage.

#### CLASS, MARRIAGEABILITY AND RESPECTABILITY

The interplay between class, education, and marriageability is key to understanding the intricacies of Chinese temporary migrant women forming romantic relationships with a view to marriage in the UK. Sociological and anthropological research has long studied the role that education plays in enhancing women's spatial and social mobility, as well as their marriageability. For example, Kringelbach (2014) argues that in the case of West African students in France, marriage to a French citizen gives them longer residence or citizenship which helps them to achieve educational goals. Tuxen (2018) looks at the interrelationships between class identity, international education, and marriageability through the case of Indian students. She finds that Indian students from different socio-economic backgrounds capitalise international education differently. For the "super elites" who come from a family business background, international education helps to maintain their existing class status and privileges, and they tend to return to India soon after graduating for a good marriage. As Kringelbach (2014, 298) states, "understanding the transformative effect of education abroad requires a focus on students as family members, which may include the roles of spouse and parents, rather than as autonomous individuals". In this sense, educational trajectories are very often part of the broader aspirations and life-course events of not only individuals, but also their family, who may have an expectation of what their life should be.

In China today, family background is not as salient as it was in the past (see chapter 2). However, China as a patriarchal society continues to protect the interests of the patrilineal family by valuing the marriages of people with *men dang hu dui* (compatible family backgrounds). *Men dang hu dui* literally refers to matching or pairing the "decorations on the top and bottom of the gates that indicated a family's socioeconomic status in the feudal era" (Ji 2015, 1067). Similarly, a popular Chinese phrase, "bamboo doors match bamboo doors, wooden doors match wooden doors" (*zhu men dui zhu men, mu men dui mu men*) is still commonly used today to express the cultural ideal that marriage should be formed between couples of similar social standing. Although this preference is sometimes seen as feudal and backward in post-reform socialist China, due to the rise of individualisation and the normalisation of "romantic love" (Yan 2003; 2006; 2010; 2013; Wang and Nehring 2014), it is still a widely accepted among young people, who have given this social norm new, individualist meanings (Ji 2015).

In China, *hukou* status (“rural” or “urban”; local or non-local) is important, along with education and income, in creating a social hierarchy favourable to urban people, who are more desirable in the marriage market (Wang and Nehring 2014; Wang and Schwartz 2018; Wei and Zhang 2016). *Hukou*-based gender systems shape people’s intermarriage preferences and opportunities (Lui 2016; 2017). Generally speaking, men who hold an urban *hukou* have higher economic privileges and power compared to their rural counterparts. For urban men, marrying a rural woman may imply that they are incapable of finding an urban wife, which may damage their social honour. Women who hold an urban *hukou* are also less likely to accept marriage proposals from rural men because of the expectation that women marry up but not down (Gao and Zhang 2011).

*Hukou* segregation, as Lui (2016) argues, limits rural-urban intimate relationships and marriages, resulting in a small number of inter-*hukou* marriages in China; the majority of which are marriages formed between urban men and rural women, who successfully compensate their inferior social status with education, beauty, and urban mannerisms. While higher education helps to increase rural women’s marriageability in China (Sier 2017), the double-standard gender systems work unfairly for the “over-achieving” urban women (see chapter 4). For example, Sarah was a 26-year-old PhD student from mainland China who told me that her mother was concerned about her marriage prospects. Worrying that Sarah would become a *sheng nu* after the completion of her PhD as her education level would be “too high” and her age “too old”, Sarah’s mother only agreed to support her study after she and her then boyfriend got engaged.

#### RICH LADY, POOR MAN: LOUIS VUITTON BAGS AND BRITISH RESIDENCY STATUS

When I first met Kelly, she was recently engaged to a mainland Chinese who at the time was about to apply for permanent residency in the UK. Her then fiancé Sam was 35 years old; their age gap was 13 years. Kelly was a rich girl from an upper middle-class background in China. Sam, on the other hand, was described by Kelly as a man who “had endured hardship”. Sam’s father died when he was an

undergraduate in China. He studied hard at university, whilst at the same time working in various part-time jobs to send money home for his two younger brothers who needed it for tuition and living expenses. It was not until his brothers had gone to university that Sam stopped taking up part-time jobs. Just like Sam, his brothers now live overseas. Sam obtained a PhD in China. In spite of having no educational qualification obtained from the UK, he was able to move to the UK as a skilled worker. He now works in an energy firm in Edinburgh with a Tier 2 visa. Kelly was aware of the class difference in this relationship. She said,

His (Sam's) family was poor and even struggled to live sometimes. But mine was very different. I have never worried about food or money since I was born. I have never eaten bitterness in life. I am always the little princess of my family. That's why Sam and I have different values in consumption sometimes. I can buy a lot! Sometimes when I buy branded things, people are curious about me. One time I said to a salesperson that I am a master's student here, she was shocked. Due to my family's networks in business and politics, our family has never missed anything in life. We are middle-class people. My granddad also did business. He opened supermarket chains in China. My granddad is very rich. Perhaps we belong to the upper middle-class... but Sam and I uphold similar moral values and are able to overcome our class differences.

Although Kelly perceived herself as having a higher-class status than Sam, her socio-economic position did not guarantee a sense of security in the UK. She said,

I know that if I go back to China, I will have good job opportunities. Staying here means my career prospects are a bit uncertain...I think I am a bit lost because I don't know what I can do after graduation. After all, I don't have any job experience before coming to the UK for my degree.

Although anxious about the future, Kelly was also excited about her weddings in both China and the UK. Kelly wanted to have a big reception in China. She said proudly,

There is no need for my husband and his family to worry [about the wedding expenses]. My family will handle everything. They will invite lots of guests in China. My parents do not ask [Sam] for much [for marrying me]. If Sam and I happened to be in trouble financially in the UK, they could also help us.

Kelly was a young Chinese girl who owned a few Louis Vuitton bags, an expensive laptop and "things that are of limited edition". Sam, on the contrary, according to Kelly, "would only go to Primark to buy clothes" and "would only throw a shirt away

when it is completely unusable". She commented, "the cheapest item I have in my wardrobe is still more expensive than the most expensive item that he has...way more expensive". From the text messages that Kelly voluntarily showed me during our interview, Sam was aware of and also felt insecure about their class and economic disparities. In one particular message, Sam texted, "I just wish I could give you a good life. You have suffered just by marrying me." Despite the different standards of material life that they were accustomed to, Sam was considered by Kelly's friends in China to be "a good catch". Kelly said,

I think some of my friends in China are jealous of me. They think that I must be quite manipulative to find a husband here...my friends that I met in the UK are happy for me, but at the same time they want to have the same thing that I have – a spouse visa and the capability to stay here. Some may think spouse visa holders are in a much better position than those poor students who need to work their way up to try to stay here. Recently, one of my friends in China also got married. We used to be close friends. But after she learnt that I was getting married to a guy over here, she didn't want to speak to me anymore. She thinks that I don't deserve this luck... I don't know.

In Kelly and Sam's example, the possession of British permanent residency or citizenship is transformed into a form of symbolic capital that acts as class/status currency, which helps Sam make up for his lower socio-economic background, as compared to Kelly's. Moreover, traditional gender discourse is at play here, which constructs *all* women's upward mobility as facilitated by transnational marriage. Kelly also suffered from one of the common stereotypical views of transnational marriage that portrays her as a "manipulative" woman, who seduced and exploited Sam for his British permanent residency. She was also regarded as "lucky" to be able to stay on in the UK without having to seek visa-sponsored employment. The acquisition of a work visa symbolises the hard work and dedication of graduate workers, whereas spouse visa holders, such as Kelly, are seen as dependants who lack symbolic capital to legitimately claim individual success.

## RESPECTABILITY, HOME OWNERSHIP AND GENDER EXPECTATIONS

In both urban China and Hong Kong, ownership of a house (and a car) has become an element of social distinction (Rocca 2017). In China, to be considered eligible for marriage, men are usually expected to buy or at least pay for the mortgage deposit on a house: “build a nest to attract a phoenix” (*zhu chao yin feng*) (see Guilford and Wong 2013). As an article in *The Economist* entitled “Married to the mortgage” (2013) puts it, marriage in China is bound up with a bourgeois institution - property - within which unmarried men and their families have to work to improve their position in the marriage market. The article quotes the findings of a recent survey conducted by Horizon China, a Beijing-based market research firm, that three-quarters of young female participants who live in coastal cities will choose a husband based on his ability to provide a home. In Hong Kong, although home ownership is a common aspiration, most women consider it neither essential before marriage, nor a necessary criterion to define a man’s marriageability due to the unaffordable property prices in Hong Kong.

Moreover, in urban cities like Shanghai and Hong Kong, grooms typically pay their would-be wives a “bride price”. Traditionally, a “bride price” or a monetary gift (*li jin*) is given to the bride and her aging parents as part of the wedding exchanges, based on the assumption that married daughters do not provide labour to the natal family after marriage. *Li jin* and the value of other wedding gifts offered by the groom are important because people are regarded as “losing face” if they present a gift that does not match their social status, or that of the receiver (Yau, Chan, and Lau 1999). Despite the transformation in gender ideologies and familial relationships, a man’s marriageability (and masculinity) is still determined by his financial ability. In fact, if a man takes up a wife without first offering her a house, a car, or a thick wad of banknotes, it is known as a “naked marriage” (Nylander 2015; Ford 2011) in urban China. While it is common for the groom’s family to offer a house, the bride’s family is also often expected to offer a new car. Since house ownership is closely related to masculinity and men’s respectability in the Chinese social context, Sam felt that he had to meet such expectations, even if a little later than usual. Kelly said,

My parents have a factory and many properties in China. It would be easy for them to sell one property in order for us to buy a house in the UK. But then, my husband doesn’t want it. He wants to be a man who can afford a house on his own. I think it is good that my husband thinks like this.

Since the idea of men taking care of home-buying (or at least the payment of the deposit) is deeply rooted in mainland China, mainland Chinese women who date or marry a British permanent resident or citizen from a Chinese or non-Chinese background may still hold onto this expectation in the UK. For instance, Rose, a 28-year-old PhD student was dating an Englishman for a year at the time of interview. She said,

My boyfriend's family is very rich. My boyfriend has already got a house! When you don't need to think about housing, everything else is simple. So I have to hold onto my boyfriend! (laughs). If I had to do it on my own, I don't know when I could actually buy a house!

Although home ownership is perceived as more important to Chinese men than women in terms of increasing their marriageability, in reality Chinese women and their families do contribute to home purchases in China. Fincher (2014) observes that it is not uncommon for both the bride and the groom to pool their resources together, especially if they want to afford one of coastal China's pricey homes. In Hong Kong, apart from the bride and groom's dual income, joint financial help from their respective families in the purchase of property is also largely the norm. Young people in Hong Kong may delay marriage to save up for a down payment, especially those who do not have adequate financial support from their family.

In the process of helping their children to fulfil their goals abroad, middle-class Chinese parents transfer "transnational family money" regularly (Tu 2019, 571), which manifests as a form of subsidies or contributions. This money acts as "the medium of care and belonging across the physical and cultural distance of national borders" (Singh, Robertson, and Cabraal 2012, 487, cited in Tu 2019, 571). This one-way flow of economic capital from middle-class parents to their children has to be understood as an upfront investment to help position the children for future success (see also Louie and Qin 2019 in their study of Chinese international students buying automobiles in Michigan). In my study, I found cases from both the mainland China and Hong Kong cohorts where this money was given to migrant daughters by their middle-class parents to buy (or contribute to the deposit for) a house in the UK, especially when the cultural expectation that the groom should buy a house for their daughter could not be fulfilled. It is also important to note that this money is particularly important among couples in which the Chinese groom cannot



get a mortgage or faces a higher interest rate because of his non-resident status. For Chinese middle-class parents, this money for a home purchase is a form of physical and economic security that they can give their migrant daughters who are now married and away from the immediate protection from home.

When financial help is needed by the Chinese brides' family, tensions may be observed. Having said that, these tensions may not have the same impact on British grooms as on Chinese grooms, especially if the British grooms are less aware of the social expectation for a man to provide "the nest" in the context of marriage in mainland China. After all, a new house is usually not included in the package of a British wedding; indeed, traditionally the bride's family is expected to shoulder most of the costs of the wedding, including the reception and ceremony. Nevertheless, in recent years, it has become a more common wedding trend that young British couples opt to forgo certain traditional elements and to share costs among members of the wedding party. For example, the couple's parents may split the costs evenly, or the costs may be split three ways between the parents and the bride and groom. Mei Mei was a 26-year-old graduate from China who was married to a British man. Her parents purchased a house outright in London to "give them a smooth start after the wedding". She said,

I think my husband doesn't think too much about this. But of course, I wouldn't tell people that the house was actually paid for by my family.

Since I did not interview Chinese women's partners in this study, I had no way of directly eliciting Mei Mei's husband's opinion about this arrangement. However, Mei Mei was reluctant to tell others, including her friends, about her family's contribution of the house not just because it was a personal issue, but also because it was considered to be undesirable in the context of Chinese marriages. A traditional Cantonese phrase *tip daai cong* could be used to describe this wedding arrangement. *Daai cong* means a big bed, which here refers to the bed of the newlyweds, but can also mean other material goods, including a house; *tip* is a verb that is used only when a person pays for the keeping of an unprofitable business or event. The phrase describes the financial loss of a bride's family when they do not receive a bride price (*li jin*), but still have to pay for a new bed for the newlyweds; thus, it also represents a loss of face and respectability.

Differences in cultural expectations about who is to finance a wedding and how to split costs can create tensions between the Chinese bride and the British groom, between the bride and her family, and between the bride's family and other extended family members and friends, who also have opinions on the matter. The Chinese migrant women that I interviewed negotiated dating, wedding, and household expenses based on the knowledge, customs, and practices about "appropriate" gender roles and relationships that they learnt and had been accustomed to throughout their lives. For instance, Fangfei was a 27-year-old PhD student from China, who was in a relationship with a British-born Chinese who was more accustomed to splitting bills evenly when dating. She said,

There are some issues that we have to negotiate and compromise on to make the relationship work. For example, here in the UK, people split the bill. I wasn't very happy about this. And I'm still not. My friends in China are surprised to know that my boyfriend and I split the costs of rent and bills evenly. Usually in China, it would be the guy who pays for everything. For example, my friend told me her boyfriend pays for the rent, it is about RMB 20,000 (about £2,000) a month.

Although Fangfei's boyfriend was also a PhD student who was unlikely to have an adequate income to fulfil her expectation, Fangfei did not rationalise their financial arrangements by her boyfriend's financial status, but instead chose to make sense of it with the logics of cultural difference (*wenhua chayi*). In a way, the different earning capability of her boyfriend and her friend's partner in China did not matter to Fangfei, nor did the different living standards between China and the UK. Fangfei perceived the differences between her situation in the UK and her friend's situation in China as a matter of difference between things that are done "here" and things that are done "back home". "Cultural difference" (*wenhua chayi*) is not just a logic for migrants to understand their current situation or to make sense of their own disappointment when expectations cannot be met; it is also used to justify their demands and negotiate their position.

Rocca (2017: 23) argues that consumerism gives rise to urban middle level consumers, who “enjoy small prosperity (*xiaokang*) and a modest degree of comfort”. Comfort is a core element of being *xiaokang*. For the first generation of middle-class people who were raised in the socialist era, a house is a symbol and embodiment of this aspiration to comfort. Chinese middle-class parents transmit to their children the love of property, so much so that in urban China, owning a flat is a prerequisite for marriage. Moreover, as Rocca notes (2017: 133) quoting Judith Audin’s PhD thesis, we can observe how property is related to status and respectability in China:

The standard requires one to live in a new residential estate or new *huayuan* (garden), that is, a vast compound surrounded with walls, protected around the clock by security guards, with a garden, parking and sometimes shops and a leisure centre.

In chapter 2, I also briefly discussed how property connected to respectability in the UK by listing a few criteria of evaluation. The significance of housing as a source of wealth and status is that it generates a powerful categorical divide between those who rent and those who own. Among homeowners, status is defined by the geography and value of the property owned. Indeed, housing wealth is critically associated with location. In general, properties in more desirable areas will have higher values than similar ones in less attractive areas. In the UK, the metropolis of London has some of the most expensive districts, for example, the mean value of properties in Kensington and Chelsea was £1.5 million, nearly 20 times more expensive than housing in the cheapest areas (Savage 2015), reflecting the status of the property owners as part of the “global elite”.

Due to the correlations between home ownership, status and security, mainland Chinese women commonly see a man who can provide a home as more marriageable. However, there is often a risk that their name will not be added to the title certificate, due to bureaucratic and social obstacles to joint registration of property in China. This situation also applies to women who contribute to the purchase of their marital home. Fincher (2014, 5) states that one of the

consequences of this phenomenon is that “Chinese women have largely missed out on what is arguably the biggest accumulation of residential real-estate wealth in history”. In order to solve property rights disputes in marital cases, the Supreme Court of China issued its latest interpretation in 2011, which specifies that marital property essentially belongs to the person whose name is on the deed of the home, unless legally contested (Zeldin 2011). In urban cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, that person is usually a man. It is worth noting that some scholars, such as Shen (2014), have questioned Fincher’s argument and the credibility of the reports she used to build the argument. Yet what my informants said about their marriage and property rights in the UK, and their concerns, relates to Fincher’s (2014) observations in urban China.

According to Fincher, although the law entitles a divorced woman to compensation for her mortgage contributions even if the family home was not registered in her name, it may not be easy for women to prove their contributions, especially if they do not document their mortgage payments properly. Also, women may pay a substantial amount of money towards household expenses, including the fittings and furnishings, even if their contribution towards a mortgage is minimal.

Davis (2010, 481) finds that when a marriage breaks down, instead of simply applying the law, mainland Chinese in urban cities (re)negotiate property rights by using a “set of normalizing practices” and moral reasoning to divide conjugal property. Here, I take a conventional view of morality as a codified system of principles and norms regarding right and wrong, good and bad. In fact, although divorce has become very common in China, with 4.2 million couples divorcing in 2016, an 8.3 per cent increase from the year before (Zhou 2017), research has shown that instead of taking a case to court, ordinary Chinese still largely rely on informal, local mediation based on moral discourse, the principles of reciprocity, and the rule of relationships to solve their disputes (Avenarius and Zhao 2012; Davis 2010). As a result, while recognising individual property rights, ordinary Chinese may also draw on their own experience and moral justification to divide conjugal property unequally, to punish the guilty party and provide for the weak (Davis 2010).

In general, migrant women who were married to a British partner from a Chinese background expressed more concern about the division of property acquired before

marriage, compared to those who were married to a non-Chinese British or EU partner, due to differences in Chinese and European marriage-divorce culture. Although the former often did not need to worry about having a home after marriage because their husband from a Chinese background already owned one, had been paying the mortgage for a premarital home, or had received a house as a gift from his parents, these women sometimes conceptualised this home as a double-edged sword after moving in.

Qing was a mainland Chinese who was married to a British citizen from Hong Kong. After their marriage, Qing moved into her husband's premarital home, which was given to him as a gift by his father, also a British and Hong Kong citizen. Although the apartment was registered under his son's name, Qing's father-in-law considered that as it was paid for with his own money, he was the *real* owner, and he could therefore use the apartment anytime he wished. She said,

I was not happy when my father-in-law came to London and stayed with us without giving us any notice. Recently, he brought some relatives with him who came here for vacation. My husband and I had to sleep on the floor. It wasn't comfortable and we had to go to work without adequate sleep. This had continued for like a month...I also suffered very bad allergy during that time. I was very tired every day. I think the biggest lesson I have learnt from this incident was that I don't actually own a place...I have no say to stop my husband's family from coming to stay with us, even if I am the one who actually lives there. Because they think I have no say at all in this matter, they don't need to ask for my permission and they don't need to have any communication with me. This situation will continue until we finally have our *own* place. But even if we have our own place, can we say no to my father-in-law and my husband's relatives, if they want to stay with us? Traditionally, we can't because if my father-in-law wants to come, he can come anytime he wants; all we can do is to accept.

The tension here originates from the different interpretations of the concept of "ownership"; one is based on patriarchal familial tradition and the other is based on individualistic modern value. Many of my Chinese informants aspired to have a husband who could provide a home, for the stability and security it supposedly brings. But when this aspiration is finally achieved, home ownership and "fair" household contribution may become issues. In another case, Vivian, who originally came to the UK as a working holiday maker from Hong Kong in her late twenties, lived in an apartment owned by her husband John, a British citizen who also immigrated from Hong Kong. Before marrying, the couple lived together for a few

months before Vivian's visa expired. Vivian contributed to all of the expenses for groceries and to restaurant bills. Although she wanted to add her name to some of the utility accounts, John thought it was too "troublesome". While Vivian considered this arrangement of household expenses "reasonable" at the time as they were not engaged, but she expected her name to be put on the property registration and the utility bills after their marriage. They discussed the matter before marrying and it turned into a big argument. She said,

He (John) told me that when he bought this newly-built flat, he bought it with insurance. Basically, the insurance ensures that if he dies, the remaining mortgage will be fully paid for. And he made his mother and two sisters who live in Hong Kong the beneficiaries. He told me this was his original idea when he bought this place. And he isn't ready to change it. But I said to him, 'I can't continue to pay for all the food, groceries and stuff without having my name on this home and household bills after we get married.' This is like I am an invisible helper who helps him to pay the mortgage and adds value to his property by contributing to some of the expenses. But the expenses will always be expenses only. They don't add any value to anything.

Interviews with several women who were married to Chinese men who owned premarital property in the UK reveal how the Chinese patriarchal system may continue to work in favour of men in terms of property ownership, especially when the Chinese parents attempt to keep their son's solely owned property as capital accumulated within their side of the family.

Young Chinese husbands often have to rely on their family's financial assistance to purchase a premarital property in the UK; their parents may have their own interpretation of home "ownership" and opinions about whether their wife should become a joint owner of the property. Husbands themselves may have little say on the matter due to their minimal contribution. Men who are currently paying mortgages may see the money that they have contributed to the house as their own, and thus be unwilling to add their wife's name to the deed in case they have to split the property wealth in divorce. A discriminatory gender discourse portrays women who have such demands as greedy, dangerous, and calculative wives who look for advantages from marriage, which creates an enormous pressure on them to give up negotiating with their husband or future husband. Women who have no ownership of the property that they live in with their husband may feel that their home does not

actually belong to them. An informant explicitly said to me, “my husband is like my landlord. Instead of paying rent to someone else, I pay him rent.”

In the end, Vivian felt overwhelmed and succumbed to the tremendous pressure to abandon the idea of adding her name to the deed. But she was still worried that if it came to a divorce, she would get nothing. Indeed, Vivian was right to have such concerns. In the UK, spouses who are the sole owners of property have more rights than non-owning spouses. This applies to both England and Scotland.<sup>23</sup> According to Standley (2010, 153ff):

Spouses who are sole owners have the right of encumbrance of the home without consulting their non-owning spouse; they do not have to register their home rights, which non-owning partners need to do to secure their legal rights; and the sole-owning spouse has the freedom to bequest the home to somebody other than the surviving non-owning spouse.

It is advised by the Ministry of Justice (2019) that after a marriage breakdown, a partner who lives in a house which is in the sole name of his or her spouse should act quickly to prevent the property from being sold without the knowledge or consent of the partner concerned, for example by entering a Notice of Home Rights against the property with the Land Registry. In the case of a divorce, the court may still have some power to make orders against any property, regardless of how it is owned. However, in the case of a separation between non-married cohabiting partners, legal protection for cohabitants who do not own a share in the home is very limited. Very rarely can cohabiting partners with no legal title claim a beneficial interest in the home after separation (Lersch and Vidal 2016).

When I raised the fact that Vivian may still be able to get a share of the property after divorce, even if her name was not registered on the deed, she said to me that she still did not feel secure because pursuing such rights could lead to conflict with her husband’s family. “And what if a property dispute is caused by my husband’s

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<sup>23</sup> In Scotland, a partner who is not a joint owner has no right to remain in the home if the owner withdraws permission for them to stay. They can apply to the court for the right to remain in the home. A partner who is not the owner cannot stop the sale of the house but may apply for limited right to remain in the home. They are not entitled to a share of the proceeds unless they are a joint owner or can show they made a financial contribution (see Citizens Advice Scotland’s webpage, 2020).

accidental death? How can I fight over a home that belongs to someone's dead son?" Vivian asked. In this imagined scenario, Vivian said she would only try to protect her own property rights, if she had a child to feed. If she remained childless, then she would consider the financial need of her mother-in-law in her old age, and thus would be more willing to give up her rights. Instead of using the English law as the only guidelines to determine who should be entitled to the house in the case of divorce or death, migrant women, such as Vivian, may apply their own cultural logic, moral reasoning, and normalising practices to understand their rights.

#### GLOBAL HYPERGAMY, SACRIFICES AND WOMEN STRIVING FOR INDIVIDUAL SUCCESS

Regardless of their partner's ethnicity or property ownership status, most of the women in this study claimed that they earned less than their partner in the UK. This reality further complicates the map of class identity, gender, and power in Chinese migrant women's marriages. Mei Mei, who I have mentioned previously, said,

My husband earns a lot more than me. He told me that he wouldn't mind being a house husband one day... Sometimes I feel quite jealous towards my husband. I am a foreigner; that's why I am not earning as well as he does. If I returned to China, I think my salary would be quite good because I have an overseas master's degree. Here, my husband is a local with a good English accent; that's why his starting point is better than mine. I would say he is very intelligent and hard-working but sometimes I also wonder why he can get a job promotion easily and earn so much more than me. You know, I don't think my ability is a lot worse than his.

Mei Mei continued,

Had it not been for my marriage, I wouldn't have considered staying in the UK because my parents and my family all live in China... Whenever I argue with my husband, I always say I have to sacrifice a lot.

Mei Mei made sense of her hindered career prospects and the wage difference between her and her husband by virtue of her immigrant status and English ability. Here, English ability refers to the ability not only to communicate, but also to master



a good accent that allows people to manoeuvre into more promising career tracks in the UK (see the discussion of embodied cultural capital in chapter 3).

The interlocking hierarchical system of gender, ethnicity, and class may create double disadvantages for Chinese migrant women like Mei Mei, who understood the hidden mechanisms that propel their husbands forward as something that they no longer have access to after migrating to the UK. This is what Mei Mei understood as “sacrifices” and prices that she paid for her marriage and settlement in the UK. Indeed, in my informants’ narratives, the notion of sacrifice is very powerful, and is used (un)consciously by female spouses to negotiate power in their relationships.

Mei Mei’s statement reveals how she understood her life choices: to return to China, a habitus or cultural and economic environment where she, as a privileged urban woman, could fit in and flourish or to remain in the UK, a country where she found herself in a disadvantageous position due to a lack of the right social and cultural capital. Here, we get a glimpse of the paradox of global hypergamy; being a Chinese migrant woman, Mei Mei’s transnational marriage in the UK is *supposed to* bring her marital mobility and a better life. While marrying a British person brought a sense of achievement, as if she had “married up”, in reality, it did not necessarily help advance her career development in the UK or her social mobility in general. This paradox is further entangled with the expectations of migrants’ parents. Chinese parents play a great role in motivating their children to pursue international education, and in manoeuvring them into a standardised “successful” life script. For migrant women, parents’ opinion of their transnational relationship or marriage is pivotal in shaping their relationship decisions. For example, Mei Mei’s parents were initially unsupportive of her decision to marry a *lao wai* (foreigner, often specifically referring to white Euro-Americans. The term is usually neutral but can be pejorative in some circumstances). She said,

My parents were quite angry because they thought they only sent me to the UK to study, not to find a man! They had the impression that women who are married to a *lao wai* become housewives. They were angry that they had invested so much in me, and now I wanted to become someone’s housewife.

Financing children’s overseas study is perceived by Chinese parents as an “investment” that supposedly brings high returns. However, Mei Mei’s personal

choice in marrying a non-Chinese partner, in her parents' eyes, entailed a risk that she would stay in the domestic domain, making her education a wasted investment and endangering her respectability. The attitude of Mei Mei's parents also shows their concern about the stigma of transnational, particularly interracial marriage, which relates to Chinese women's perceived inferior racial and sexual positions, as compared to their British or European husband. In Nemoto's (2004) PhD thesis, she examines the operation of several culturally embedded imaginary discourses that permeate gender and racial inequalities in relationships between Asian women and White American men. First, the immigration discourse portrays immigrant women as either commodities or object of protection; second, popular stereotypes portray Asian women as overly sexual and feminine; and third, the discourse of romantic love in the context of colonialism and neo-colonialism results in power imbalance in inter-racial relationships. Nemoto's findings can also help explain Chinese middle-class parents' ambivalence about their daughters forming interracial relationships in the UK, putting their respectability at risk.

Perhaps not in the same context, but in a separate example, Fangfei also described her parents as "scared" when they heard about her transnational relationship with a British-born Chinese. She said,

My parents are worried that because I am dating a BBC (British-born Chinese) now, I will never return to China. They are scared, I can tell...they are also concerned about whether my boyfriend can provide. They asked me what kind of job he has, and I said he is only a student.

Similarly, Ling Ling, who also initially came to the UK as a student, said that her parents were not particularly pleased about her relationship in the UK. She said,

When my visa was about to run out, my parents were a bit worried because if I decided to marry him, I would be so far away from home. If this man bullied me or if I was not happy, my parents would not know. They would be too far away to protect me. Also, as I am the only child, they really don't want me to move so far away.

Although informants' parents did not speak to me directly, these statements show informants' own perceptions of their parents' major concerns regarding their intention to remain in the UK, and their partner's imagined financial status, virtue, and temperament. "Angry", "concerned" and "scared" are the feelings that migrants thought their parents experienced when they learnt about their relationship in the

UK. It seems to me that my informants' parents, who were from a middle-class background in China or Hong Kong, did not anticipate that transnational or interracial marriage would necessarily benefit their daughter or advance her social mobility.

Nowadays, Chinese middle-class parents commonly pin all their hope on their only child, regardless of the child's gender. Middle-class families' devoutness and investment in their daughter's education are based on the belief that education is the only way to advance up the social ladder and increase one's potential of becoming successful (Bai 2006; Fong 2011). Moreover, supporting a daughter's higher education is now seen as an investment for the parents to be financially, emotionally and even physically taken care of in their old age, based on the belief that daughters, rather than sons, are more likely to take care of their natal family even after marriage (Evans 2008; Judd 1989; Obendiek 2016). Despite the rise in overseas tuition fees, and an increase in employment insecurity after graduation since the late 1990s which means that some families' investment in their offspring's higher education may never pay off, many middle-class mainland Chinese and Hong Kong families remain determined to equip their children with a foreign degree, in the hope that their children will return home after graduation for career development. This may explain parents' negative feelings about their child's relationship and decision to remain in the UK.

In chapter 4, I discussed how the financial contributions of Hong Kong informants to their natal family is the main way for them to observe filial piety – a virtue of respect for one's parents in Chinese Confucian philosophy - and how single women may receive less familial pressure to marry as a result. However, for those who hope to stay abroad with a low-income job, or to marry a foreign partner who is largely ambivalent towards this alien concept of remittance, it may not be possible to contribute money to their family "back home". This may also explain Hong Kong parents' hesitancy towards migrant daughters' transnational relationship or marriage.

Finally, some informants explained that a close parental-child relationship may also make parents feel reluctant to support their transnational relationship initially, due to the fear that they would leave China or Hong Kong permanently.

Chinese parents' expectations of their migrant daughters, and ambivalence towards their daughters' transnational or interracial relationship or marriage point to the struggles experienced by young Chinese migrant women, who find themselves in the "age of ambition" (Osnos 2014). Individuals are expected to strive for individual success, wealth, and power as much as they can, and to meet new social, gender, and familial expectations (Rofel 2007; Yan 2003; 2013). The women in this study embarked on a journey to the UK, hoping to gain cultural, social economic and symbolic capital by obtaining an overseas education, accumulating foreign work experience, and finding a partner. The ultimate goal is to join a global elite, fulfilling their own and their parents' expectations. In the face of the difficulties of securing visa-sponsored employment and obstacles to their transnational pursuits created by the immigration and visa regime, Chinese migrant women were constantly torn between different, contradictory goals. Marriage immigration was, on the one hand, perceived to be one of the easiest ways to remain in the UK; but on the other hand, perceived as a kind of "reliance on men" that puts middling women's respectability at risk, rather than as a marker of individual success. For instance, Sofia was in a relationship with an EU national during her master's study in the UK. They were together for nearly a year before they broke up. She said,

My ex-boyfriend once said to me, "If you want to stay in the UK, we could get married." It sounds easy, and I wouldn't need to find a visa-sponsored job...But if I manage to stay here, I hope it is because of my own ability, not by relying on someone else.

Migrant women, such as Sofia, faced the dilemmas of fulfilling parental expectations to excel in life through their *own* means, and achieving their life goals and transnational aspirations through forming a transnational marriage – a path that migrants were not necessarily pleased to take due to the associated gender and racial stereotypes and the fear of being seen as a woman involved in a sham marriage or sex-for-visa arrangement (Hoang and Yeoh 2015).

Women who were involved in a transnational relationship or marriage talked about how sexism, racism, and other discriminatory gender and cultural discourses harmed their relationship and hurt their feelings. These discourses are further consolidated and reproduced by the structural inequality of residency statuses

between a UK resident and a foreign spouse in the visa system, making a Chinese wife “dependent” on her British husband.

Qiana, originally a student migrant, now a Tier 2 work visa holder said,

My ex-boyfriend once said to me, “you are with me just because of my British passport”. Even though he said it in a joking way, I just didn’t like it. It became a thorn in my heart. When I confronted him, he said it was just a joke and apologised. But there was no use...he had already hurt me. It is a kind of power inequality, you know. Why do I need to rely on you to stay here? I think white superiority definitely exists...my ex-boyfriend earned less than me, but in his mind, he was still superior to me.

Ying Men, a 32-year-old EEA family permit holder, also talked about how her transnational marriage was commonly perceived through the lens of sexism. She recalled an incident which happened shortly after her marriage in the UK. She said,

I remember my landlord said to me, “he (Ying Men’s husband) is now your boss because he sponsors your visa so that you can stay here.” I said to him, “he is not my boss. I can also find some other people to sponsor me. I can still look for other people to help me if I want.” When the landlord said this, my husband was right next to me. When he heard my reply, he went “hey!” Then I explained to him that I meant to say I could find an employer to sponsor me a work visa, not another man to sponsor me a spouse visa.

Chinese migrant women fought against these discriminatory cultural discourses and gender stereotypes by emphasising that they are capable and non-calculative, and that they are not taking advantage of their British partner. At the same time, women undermined, challenged, and delegitimised their partner’s supposedly “superior” position by pointing out that their success is not based on their own efforts alone, but is propelled by the profound advantages (gender, racial, and class backgrounds) that they have enjoyed. For example, immediately after making the aforementioned statement, Ying Men said,

The thing is I don’t think I need to obey him (her husband) just because he sponsors me a visa. He doesn’t need a visa to live in the UK because he was born in the EU. This is nothing but luck.

Similarly to Mei Mei, Ying Men empowered herself through the notions of choice and sacrifice. She continued,

I don't think I owe my husband anything. Helping me to stay is just one thing my husband needs to do or sacrifice. I also have to give up a lot to make the relationship work. This is not a matter of who owes the other more. *That's why I think our relationship is equal...* I have many options. I could get a tier 2 visa to stay here. If no company sponsored me with a visa, I could go to Hong Kong, USA or China for work. I chose to stay here because my husband and I love each other. That's why he chose to help me stay. If you don't love me, you don't need to help me. I think you have to be confident, otherwise your husband would not *respect* you. What I did was to talk to my husband to let him know that he actually had a choice. He could choose not to help me. I said to him, "but if you choose to help me stay, then don't be so nosey to your friends about this and don't remind me over and over again how you have done me a favour or something."

Although transnational marriages are ethicised, gendered, and hierarchical according to cultural perceptions (Collins 1998; Nagel 2003) and structural systems, such as the immigration system, power relations between migrant women and their partner are contextual, relative, dynamic, and constantly shifting. The class background of these women empowers them; through the notions of sacrifice and choice, they emphasise that they are the "good women" who, regardless of their privileged background and educational qualifications, make a choice to stay in the UK for love, and make sacrifices for marriage, including giving up career opportunities and good life chances in China or Hong Kong. Women's making of an "equal relationship" is important because this is a way by which they can become a respectable and worthy individual whose sexuality is moral. Consider Sofia's comments about her past relationship:

I don't want my boyfriend to think that I am in love with him just because of his residency status. I am very serious about our relationship. I don't want to do exchange. I only want to be with someone because of love. I don't want to be one of those women who seduces a man just for his citizenship. I know some Chinese women are like that, but I am different.

Also, consider what Kelly said about her husband Sam,

Sam doesn't need to have a house or a car first before marrying me. I don't demand gifts. I don't need a man to please me with material goods, which makes me quite different from those lower-class women in China... I write my husband love letters and give him gifts.

Apart from using the discourse of love (see also chapter 4) and emphasising the non-pragmatic nature of the relationship, Sofia also maintained her respectability

and middle-classness by drawing class and moral boundaries, differentiating herself from other women “who seduce a man just for his citizenship” (see Xiao 2011; Ang 2016 on the relational concept of respectable femininity). Kelly distinguished herself from “lower-class women” in China by claiming that she was not materialistic. From her perspective, a house, a car or material goods were not perceived as important when it came to developing relationships with men. When considering Kelly’s class background, one can imagine part of the reason that she said she did not need a man to please her with material goods was because she was confident that she could buy whatever she wanted herself. More importantly, she emphasised that in her romantic relationship with Sam, she did not “demand” from him but “gave”. In this way, being a giver (not being selfish or manipulative) in romantic relationships or marriages is considered as moral. Morality here concerns a moral gender attitude and behaviour, or the quality of being in accord with standards of right or good gender conduct. While female sexuality is celebrated when romantic love is involved, women’s instrumentalism in heterosexual relationships tends to be held in contempt. The social belief that love is entirely ethical and that pragmatic greed is always immoral remains strong. In both Sofia and Kelly’s example, they both claimed a higher moral ground by distancing themselves from women who would “do exchange” and lower-class women who would “demand gifts” and material goods.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have explored women’s self-fashioning as respectable Chinese marriage migrants in the UK. I have argued that the differences between migrant women and their partner in terms of class, gender, culture, and in some cases, race and ethnicity, and women’s expectations in transnational relationships and marriage foreground the tensions of negotiating respectable femininity. I have discussed the paradoxes of global hypergamy, and how middle-class Chinese women are torn between contradictory aspirations to fulfil the expectations of becoming an independent and achieving individual, and to be seen as a woman who has accomplished marital mobility. I have shown that although global hypergamy may

work as an advantage for some women, for middling migrant women who consider themselves as coming from a privileged background in their country of origin, the expectation that they should “marry up” creates intense pressure to marry to someone who has a higher class background or is able to provide them with a life that signifies their upward marital mobility.

I have also discussed the tensions between respectability and security, marriage and self-achievement, in migrant women’s transnational lives. Most of the women from both mainland China and Hong Kong in this study wished for the stability and security brought by home ownership and marriage, and were content to have a partner who could provide that in the UK. Although this aspiration to own a home is not necessarily class-related, women’s practices in negotiating it with their Chinese or non-Chinese partner, and their natal family, are defined by their class. For some wealthy brides, when their Chinese or non-Chinese groom cannot afford to buy a house or pay for the deposit on a property in the UK, their family may provide financial assistance. However, this practice does not conform to the traditional gender ideal and cultural expectations, and may suggest that the bride is not marrying up, thus creating tensions. “Cultural difference” (*wenhua chayi*) becomes a logic through which migrant women comprehend their disappointment when their expectations of their Chinese or non-Chinese partner in the UK to buy a home or take full responsibility for restaurant bills and household expenses cannot be fulfilled.

Simultaneously, most of the women that I interviewed were willing to share living costs with their partner and to ensure that the contributions of both parties are more or less “fair” to create a sense that their relationship or marriage is “equal”. Contradiction lies at the heart of women’s complex aspirations related to transnational marriage. On the one hand, they wish to show that they are able to “marry up”, but on the other hand, they hope to have an “equal” relationship to demonstrate that they are not relying upon or taking advantage of their partner. They also (re)construct and (re)negotiate their respectability through the notions of choice and sacrifice. Finally, by distancing themselves from women whom they perceived as materialistic, manipulative, or having qualities that they associate with the lower class, Chinese middle-class women maintain their respectability.



## CONCLUSION

This thesis has presented a study of a middle-class migration pattern that is a relatively new but also increasingly normalised part of a career-life strategy in both mainland China and Hong Kong. It reveals how temporary migration to the UK has become an important and common resource for middle-class Chinese, not only for young migrants themselves, but also for their sponsors, such as their parents; a reality that is almost unimaginable for the previous Chinese generations.

At the same time, the UK's immigration policies have become increasingly stringent over the past decade, directly shaping people's experiences of migration and life transitions, including marriage. The UK Immigration Rules set minimum income thresholds both for professional migrant workers to be considered eligible for a work visa, and for settled UK-based individuals to qualify as a visa sponsor for their non-EEA spouse. In doing so, UK immigration policy filters potential migrants wishing to take either the employment or marriage immigration route, and creates a homogenous middle-class migrant population from mainland China and Hong Kong. The population of skilled migrant workers already belongs to the middle-class, and the population of marriage migrants, if not already hailing from a middle-class background, will at least marry a UK-based sponsor whose income bracket could reasonably be considered to position them as middle-class, and they will consequently form a middle-class family unit.

Migrants who are able to meet the strict financial requirements are not out of the water yet. As they and/or their partner are very often young career-starters, whose mobility between jobs tends to be high, being tied to the visa system means that they must continue to comply with the Home Office's ongoing requirements. This can limit their options and have a fundamental effect on the choices they make for themselves and their families. This qualitative study examines the lived experiences and struggles of young Chinese middle-class temporary migrants in the UK, and provides rich contextual analysis of their agency, dilemmas, and choices.

The dominant discourses on Chinese middle-class transnationalism in migration studies generalise migrants' experiences as instrumental hypermobility. Examples

include Ong's (1999) concept of "flexible citizenship", and literature that examines family strategies to accumulate capital utilising concepts such as "astronaut fathers" (Waters 2002) and "parachute kids" (Zhou 1998). According to Lin (2011, 138), studies of Chinese middling migrants seem to be "overly preoccupied with the conduct of flexibility". Although flexibility in mobility is often celebrated as a positive quality or condition that allows people to become adaptative to the global environment and attain the status of global citizen, the young migrants in this study narrated migration stories that reveal the contingency of temporary mobility, which may result in unexpected (and sometimes undesired) outcomes that require them to reconfigure their expectations and make compromises.

The new middle-class temporary migrants, who are younger than previous waves of migrants from China and Hong Kong, and arguably have limited capital and unfixed immigration goals, are subjected to institutional temporalities that make their futures uncertain. This has implications for the way migrants negotiate their desires and goals in their career and personal life, and their relationships, including but not limited to their relationships with their partner and parents. Even these relatively well-resourced individuals often experience a sense of loss of control over their present and future, the rhythms of daily social life, and their desired normative life trajectories due to the complexities of visa-induced temporalities.

## YOUNG MIDDLE-CLASS CHINESE MIGRANTS

My research has demonstrated that although young Chinese migrants initially entered the UK under specific visa categories, such as student and youth mobility scheme, their goals are multiple and often contradictory. Interviews with 67 informants have shown that temporary migration to the UK is not just about the acquisition of cultural capital and overseas work experience, but also what migrants hope to become and achieve through embarking on such a journey. Kipnis (2011) argues that higher education should be understood less as a means to an end and more as an object of desire in itself. The same could be argued for studying abroad or simply going abroad. There exists a strong imaginative link between transnational migration (even if it is only temporary) and the promise of life change (Fong 2011).

Young migrants often expect to experience profound personal change that will lead to the achievement of success, and this expectation is shared by their peers and family (Thøgersen 2012). Focusing on young, well-educated, middle-class Chinese migrants who live in the UK temporarily, this thesis has examined the aspirations and constraints associated with efforts to live a transnational life, and the different sets of tensions and dilemmas experienced in attempting to meet familial, societal, and self-expectations in career and marriage.

In the face of the highly stratified and intensely competitive Asian job market (Hao and Welch 2012), and the overseas credential inflation in the job market of urban China and Hong Kong, my informants were aware that studying abroad may no longer guarantee a “successful” career path. Having benefited from resources provided by their middle-class families, young migrants felt ambitious about getting ahead, but even more anxious about falling behind. Although many saw the acquisition of a British work visa as a form of “success”, in reality, very few Chinese migrants in my study successfully transitioned into the British employment market. As for the working holiday makers from Hong Kong, many could only seek temporary and low-paid jobs that they often perceived as beneath them.

Pursuing transnational goals and establishing a life overseas takes time, which migrants in this study lacked due to the limited duration of their visas. However, coming from a more privileged background enabled some to (re)negotiate migration opportunities, for example prolonging their stays by switching from one visa to another, or returning to the UK after their visa expired when circumstances allowed. By examining such patterns of behaviour, this thesis contributes to the discussion of transnationality and temporality in contemporary migration, which scholars no longer see as temporally linear and spatially unidirectional from home to host country.

My analysis of the development and deployment of personal and family capital contributes to understanding of the formation of an immensely important new Chinese middle-class. The increase of its number is significant in the eyes of the Chinese government, as well as social theorists, who view the development of a middle-class society as a force for socio-political stability, good governance, and economic and democratic progress in China (Rocca 2008; Li 2010; Li 2013). In 2009, Chunling Li, a sociologist at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences,

conducted a content analysis by using a database of major academic journals and periodicals in China, which looks at the surging number of journal articles with “middle-class” in the title (2009, 48). The figure rose from below 5 in 1979 to nearly 60 in 2007. These studies, along with research conducted by non-Chinese scholars or published outside of China, examine various aspects of the emerging Chinese middle-class, for example the formation of a middle-class society as a national project and aspiration (Goodman 2014); the social meanings of being middle class (Rocca 2017), consumption behaviours of the middle-class (Jaffrelot and Veer 2008); and their attitudes toward democracy (Chen 2013; Miao 2016). Currently, most of this type of research looks at what happens in the country of origin, but my research shows that what takes place in temporary migration destinations like the UK is not peripheral but rather is thoroughly integrated into the new transnational spaces of personal and family strategies. Through this thesis, I also seek to make an empirical contribution to Chinese transnational migration literature and studies of social change in China today.

Driven by the growing interest in the changing social structure in China among Chinese and foreign scholars and the Chinese government, most recent research looks at what is happening within China, for example, observing and debating the existence, trends, and implications of the Chinese middle-class. The smaller body of research that studies young middle-class Chinese in a transnational migration context tends to focus on migrants’ journey to achieve social reproduction through international education (see Tsang 2013; Tu 2016).

My thesis examines the lives of young Chinese middle-class migrants, who on the one hand, struggle to extend their stays in the UK, and on the other hand seek to build a middle-class identity that is recognised both in their home countries and the UK, where the cultures of class and ways of attaining status are different. This focus highlights the particular processes that my informants go through and the tensions that they face, that is different from previous similar research, for example: Rocca’s (2017) study of the making of middle class in China; Tu’s (2018) research on Chinese migrants who succeed in settling in the UK and their families in China; and Hu’s (2018) book about British-Chinese interethnic marriages. While my thesis shares similar ground with Kajanus’s (2015) work on Chinese student migrants and their gendered expectations, it also sets itself apart by emphasising migrants’

temporal urgency to obtain British residency rights and their investment in and conversion of different forms of capital.

Inspired by Rocca's (2017) work on the social meanings of being middle class in China, this thesis however is different as it investigates what it means to be a Chinese middle-class person in a transnational context. Wright and Shin (1988) argue that class is an embodiment of both the past and possible future in the present. This temporal element of class intersects with the temporality of migration, shaping temporary migrants' understanding of class, present class position, and aspirations to attain a certain class status in a particular country in the future. By looking at class as an unfixed, undefined and ever-changing entity rather than as rigid, definable category, it is possible to see class positions as something that migrants need to negotiate through looking backward and forward, and undergoing a process of learning in a new cultural environment. Linking temporality to class analysis in migration studies also changes the way we understand migrants' class experiences and life choices in relation to class and respectability.

In contrast to Tu's (2018) book *Education, Migration and Family Relations between China and the UK: The Transnational One-Child Generation*, which looks at both the one-child generation of Chinese migrants who succeeded in settling in the UK, and their parents in China, my research looks at people seeking to remain in the UK. This draws attention to different challenges and dilemmas faced by migrants, whose lives are shaped by their desire to pursue respectability, the effects of temporal pressures of gendered expectations, and the timescales of UK immigration system.

With regards to interethnic intimate relationships, Hu's (2016) *Chinese-British Intermarriage: Disentangling Gender and Ethnicity* gives me insights into the lived experiences of ethnic intermarriage in Chinese-British families in the UK. While undoubtedly important and also inspiring for my own research, Hu's work focuses more on the multiple identities as migrant, member of an ethnic minority, intimate partner, and gendered individual, but less so as part of the transnational middle class that my thesis addresses.

Through analysing the processes of capital conversion, showing the varieties of cultural capital, such as *suzhi*, morality and respectable sexuality, and demonstrating the significance of temporal capital and different subtypes of social

capital, i.e. family capital and intimate relationship capital, of Chinese middle-class migrants in the UK, this thesis generates new empirical and theoretical insights. Coming from different political, socio-economic and social-cultural systems, Chinese migrants have to go through processes of adaptation as they seek to position themselves within the social class “hierarchy” operating in British society. While the possession of cultural capital remains a central identity marker, the experiences of my informants who have shown that the conversions between cultural capital and the other three forms of capital – social, economic and symbolic – are often not easy. For migrants hoping to stay on in the UK, the goal is to possess or accumulate as much temporal capital as possible, whilst building a middle-class identity in the UK. I argue that family capital in the forms of financial subsidy is vital to allow young migrants to enjoy middle-class consumption and lifestyles, including owning a property, even if their current income or savings cannot meet such desires. For some, Chinese parents’ temporary provision of childcare to their migrant daughter or son also enables the young migrant, who is at an early career stage, to focus on career development in the UK. By shedding light on migrants’ self-fashioning processes in negotiating their class identity and capital conversion processes in a new country where different rules of attaining class status may be observed, it changes the way we understand migrants’ class experiences and life choices in relation to class and respectability.

## NEGOTIATING CHINESE RESPECTABLE FEMININITY

In the process of conducting this research, I realised that I was investigating a highly gendered field. There exist some ethnographies that look more specifically at young Chinese women’s gendered experiences and aspirations in international education. Noteworthy here is Kajanus’s (2015) *Chinese Student Migration, Gender and Family*. Kajanus (2015) concludes that despite familial investment in young Chinese women to pursue international education, gender expectations and norms continue to shape both the kind of support that is given and the receiver’s obligations. Kajanus points out that “women as daughters are supported to success, but as wives and mothers, they are not” (p.1). Women are expected to become wives and

mothers, but achieving these goals is often not celebrated as a form of success, but rather a gendered requirement that one must fulfil.

Kaianus's observation resonates with my own finding, which shows that in spite of being supported in their overseas education pursuits, young migrant women are still expected to find their place in marriage and job markets that are highly gendered, and they have to ensure their education or transnational goals do not jeopardise their chance of getting married.

Seeking to build capital or achieve goals and respectability through marriage, marriage immigration is especially pertinent to women in Chinese culture. My study has shown that educational or working holiday migration is often a trajectory for women to achieve broader aspirations in life. In general, the main pressure on the Chinese men in my interview sample was to secure post-study employment and achieve career goals. Many male migrants considered the possibility of returning to their home country one day and thought that an accumulation of years of overseas work experience would be beneficial to their career development "back home". While they did seek romance, and wished to form relationships in the UK, they felt less pressure to get married and settle down than the women did. I have highlighted such gender specificities at play throughout this thesis.

I have argued that migrant women's strategies and struggles in negotiating marriage and class status should be viewed as connected to the notion of Chinese feminine respectability in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Critical scholarship on individualism and neoliberalism has emphasised that while the entrepreneurial, self-governing subject (Rose 1999; Rose and Miller 1992) is praised, the subject is also increasingly held responsible for determining his or her success. For women, one of the effects of individualisation is the emergence of the feminisation of success, which generates an expectation for women to achieve success by relying on themselves, but not on men.

The young Chinese middle-class women in this study are endowed with a set of meanings under the contemporary interpretations of respectable femininity: they should be attractive, educated, independent and liberal, but still conform to the expected gendered duty to marry and reproduce. I argue that Chinese migrant women lived in the "confused settings" described by Lahad (2013: 24) in which they

are required to construct their own successful portfolios in both professional and personal lives, and to constantly adjust their goals, expectations, desires and priorities in order to gain respectability.

Young middle-class Chinese women find themselves standing at a crossroads, being pulled in different directions by the forces of traditional Chinese culture that ties women to their domestic, caring, and social roles; modern Chinese culture that promotes dual-income families and the making of professional “new women”; and individualistic British culture that supports the idea that individuals should make their own life decisions with minimal familial influence or intervention. At the same time, the popular Chinese state-sponsored gender discourse of *sheng nu* (leftover women) pressures urban Chinese single women to follow a maternal heteronormative life track by making them feel they are not being responsible to themselves, their family and society if they do not marry at a certain age. This study provides evidence of clashes between individualism and familism in a transnational setting, and of the changing patterns of migration and familial systems in China.

I argue that even after marrying, these women continue to struggle to fulfil different sets of expectations in career and family life, and face dilemmas in achieving respectability. Although migrant women may be able to navigate immigration constraints and escape from the social stigma surrounding women’s singlehood by marrying, the deployment of marriage as an immigration strategy is very often a double-edged sword. Young women’s major struggle, as I explained in the last chapter, is related to the new and old modalities of feminine subjectivity, and the contradictory images that “middle-class woman” and “marriage migrant” entail.

On the one hand, marrying someone who can sponsor a visa is a manifestation of migrants’ capability and agency in managing their personal life and creating a pathway to continue their pursuit of transnational goals. On the other hand, transnational, and especially interracial, marriage and the norm of global hypergamy bring different sets of stigmas concerning Chinese women’s sexuality and instrumentality. Migrant women’s reliance on men (the UK-based partners) to acquire a British visa and extend their stay in the UK provokes a sense of insecurity among themselves and their family “back home”, due to the culturally embedded imagination and stereotypes that tie these women to the ideas of domesticity and



dependence. This is in contrast to women who stay on through securing a skilled job and a work visa. They are perceived as respectable due to their success in converting cultural capital into economic and temporal capital in the UK. Those who form a transnational marriage after a short courtship are often subjected to further cultural stereotypes and social suspicion concerning the authenticity and maturity of their relationship.

Chinese marriage migrants in this study faced dilemmas in fulfilling of their own and their family's expectations to become powerful, successful, self-sustained, married women, and becoming marriage migrants who have to depend on their spouse for residency status and even financial support. None of the women that I interviewed hoped to become a full-time housewife after marrying, considering this domestic role a "waste" of their talent and education, and their family's investment in them. At the same time, most married women claimed that they earned a lot less than their partner, who sponsored their visa, and admitted feeling disappointed and frustrated at times.

Most migrant women (and their parents) embraced the new modern feminist discourse which values women's independence and self-reliance, largely in financial terms through employment. Yet such values did not seem to conflict with their preference to have partner who was a higher-earner than them or could provide a home and a sense of security. This is especially the case for women who formed a relationship in the UK with a view to marriage, as they often expected, and were expected by their peers and family, to "marry up" due to the norm of global hypergamy. I have examined these contradictory demands and desires, as well as the tensions they constitute.

At the same time, Chinese middle-class migrant women sought to establish respectability by emphasising their love and sacrifice in their marriage, and distancing themselves from lower-class or other women whom they perceive as manipulative, materialistic, or not respectable, for example exchanging love for a visa. Middle-class women rhetorically asserted their cultural and moral ascendancy over those who they are not. The dichotomous perception of "love" and "sacrifice" as middle-class properties; and instrumentality in relationships as a lower-class attribute, was used by my informants to reaffirm their class identity. This

stereotypical perception of the lower class or other women by their middle-class counterparts, and the widening gulf between the two groups, is described by Hu (2016: 231) in his study of Chinese-British families as an “Ethnic War”.

Despite middle-class Chinese women’s claim to a higher sexual moral ground, this study reveals that interest and emotion are entangled within their own marriage strategies and love relationships. Although scholars have long studied marriage as a prime institution for the middle-class to conflate different kinds of capital, ensure the safe transmission of privilege, and strengthen transnational social networks (see Charsley 2005; Sabur 2014), few studies have analysed how the middle-class individuals negotiate interest and emotion when considering relationships or marriage. This thesis has explored why and how marriage with someone who can sponsor a UK visa may be an attractive option for Chinese middle-class migrants. It discusses their strategic sexuality, and how they make sense of and justify their decision to marry, knowing that they can obtain economic benefits, social mobility, pleasure, and immigration opportunities by doing so.

## TIME, TEMPORARY MIGRATION AND MARRIAGE

Neither ethical love nor pragmatism alone can fully explain middle-class Chinese women’s engagement in romantic relationships during their temporary migration to the UK. In chapter 5, I have argued that women’s relationship and marriage decisions are shaped by the visa regime, migrants’ state of temporariness, and their personal timing and societal expectation of “marrying on schedule” in the Chinese social context.

According to ageist and patriarchal social scripts, younger women have an advantage of beauty and fertility over older women, and enjoy higher marriageability (Lahad 2013). Age marks the temporal boundaries that determine whether an individual gets to enjoy the privilege to be praised for remaining single; this privilege is often short-lived and dependent upon one’s age and gender. For example, women over the age of thirty are widely considered in Chinese societies to have

passed the normative stage preceding marriage and parenthood. Women in their twenties are therefore expected to conform to the norm before it is too late.

I have explored how this intense social scrutiny and visa-induced temporalities have psychological impacts on migrant women and their partners in the UK. Since the expiration of temporary visas is inevitable, my informants and their partners were often stressed and worried about the future of their relationship, which in some cases required cross-border maintenance, a quick marriage decision, or a potentially lengthy marriage negotiation. It was very common for couples to break up before or soon after the expiration of the migrant's visa. It was also not unusual for migrants to temporarily return to their home country whilst waiting for further clarity in the relationship and switching onto a new British visa. During this period of waiting and separation, migrants' opportunity to secure permanent jobs and their upward social mobility either at home or abroad may be denied and delayed, and the well-being of transnational couples may be hindered. For women who are approaching or have passed the age of thirty, and are keen to get married soon, this period of waiting may create greater anxiety. This is because time and youth are considered valuable resources, which could be lost and wasted if a committed relationship fails to lead to marriage.

In this thesis, I have argued that temporary migrants' life-course decisions and their timing should be understood as a complex entanglement of institutional and individual framings of time (see also King et al. 2006; Parreñas 2010). I have theorised the complex relations between various forms of time - "historical time", "gendered marriage time", "gendered reproduction time", "state-sponsored time", and "state-controlled time" - to study how time forms part of the top-down institutional infrastructures that regulate transnational mobility and the progression of individuals through roles and stages of the life-course. I argue that young Chinese migrant women's life transitions are not free from the influence of social expectation, the gendering of time, and state intervention.

This study contributes to recent theorisation of the temporalities of migration by discussing how the overlapping and intersecting layers of social, cultural, and political-temporal orderings (see also Robertson 2018) shapes migrants' experiences of lived time in the present, and their imaginaries of the future. I have

argued that it is not only migrants themselves who are affected by the temporal dynamics of migration, but also their partners and families, whose lives are inter-dependent with migrants’.

Two years after conducting my research interviews, some of my key informants still kept me updated about their lives. Vivian had started her first job with a permanent contract in a completely English-speaking workplace in London after marrying, and had been struggling to deal with the pressure from work. Qing, who always wanted her *own* home and did not have a sense of ownership and belonging to the flat that was purchased by her father-in-law, put up with a job which she did not enjoy as an educational adviser for prospective Chinese students for a year, and secured a mortgage for a house just outside of London with her husband. Soon afterwards, Qing left the job, and now plans to become self-employed by setting up a nail salon at home, catering to Asian customers. After struggling to find a stable and well-paid job in the UK, Lin Lin decided to return to China to re-prioritise her life goals from focusing on marriage to building her career, whilst her husband remained in the UK to pursue his own career. Although they are still married, the couple has no plan to reunite in either China or the UK. The last time I contacted Lin Lin, she told me that she recently suspected her husband was having an affair in London.

Cher and her Korean husband, despite considering and arguing about moving to Seoul, decided to stay in London. Belle and her husband Chris are now happily married. Belle keeps her close ties to Hong Kong by returning once a year; Belle’s mother also flies to London occasionally to visit her daughter. The last time I spoke to Ronald, he was in his final year of a nursing programme and was happy in his new relationship. After failing to prolong their stay in the UK, Yi Fung and his wife had moved to Germany. The developments in my informants’ lives highlight their resilience, resourcefulness, and flexibility in creating “contingent, multi-directional and multi-stage mobility pathways” (Robertson 2018: 3). These new experiences add value to their capital portfolios, giving them agency in navigating what is now a global arena.

In concluding, I would note that this research is not without limitations. First, due to the nature of qualitative research, it is not possible to generalise the findings to the population of young Chinese temporary migrants in the UK as a whole. This

research nevertheless offers valuable insights into Chinese middling migrants' migration motivations, class experiences, and struggles in meeting their transnational goals, such as obtaining visa-sponsored employment opportunities, earning a decent income, and achieving prolonged stays, despite their ambitions and socio-economic backgrounds. Second, since I did not interview my informants' partners in the UK, I had no direct means with which to either understand their perspectives, or validate or challenge my informants' narratives. Nonetheless, these narratives respond to the key research purpose of this thesis: to examine how migrants navigate lives in the UK, particularly in the aspects of employment, romance, marriage, class, and respectability. Third, the perspectives of Chinese migrant men fall within the scope of this study, but the data analysed throughout this thesis has largely related to the construction of modern Chinese feminine respectability, rather than Chinese masculinity. Moreover, this study does not attempt to address the experiences of women who choose to remain of their own accord, especially professional women who live in the UK temporarily on a work visa, which could be a valuable subject for future research.

My thesis also points to several areas for future research. I propose that the tensions and dilemmas that I have discussed in this thesis are not exclusive to Chinese women, and can be explored in studies of women's negotiation of familial duties, career goals, and class status all over the world. An interesting avenue for future research with Chinese migrant women is their decision to have children (or not), the timing of such reproduction, and the new dilemmas that they face in negotiating respectability and "successful" womanhood.

My aim in carrying out this study was to develop an initial understanding of the formation of a new Chinese middle-class living overseas temporarily, whose intention to return to their home country is uncertain. I cannot help but wonder whether these young individuals will acquire flexible citizenship or become "astronaut parents" as their migration trajectories continue and as they grow older. It is my hope that my research will stimulate further investigation into these important contemporary topics.

At the time of writing, Hong Kong has seen months of anti-government protests, which were initiated in response to changes to a law that would allow extradition to

mainland China. Protesters worry that this bill would expose people from Hong Kong to unfair trials and violent treatment, and could be used to target activists, journalists, or anyone considered by the authorities to be criminal suspects. Clashes between police and protesters have become increasingly violent with police using tear gas and rubber bullets, and protesters storming the parliament building (BBC News 2019). The situation shows no sign of dying down, despite widespread rumour among the general public that the Chinese authorities are ready to send in troops to end the protests (Branigan 2019).

In the midst of the protests, I spoke to some of my Hong Kong informants, such as Vivian and Ronald, who had expressed their political concerns about Hong Kong during the interviews I conducted two to three years ago. Our recent conversations made me realise that despite being migrants in the UK, they are far from indifferent towards Hong Kong politics. These young migrants enjoy a privileged life, which enables them to maintain close ties to Hong Kong by paying regular visits. Their circumstances are vastly different from the early settlers and Hong Kong Chinese immigrants of previous generations, which I have discussed in chapter 3, who lacked the resources or initiative to make return journeys. Compared to these older migrants and members of the new middle-class who never leave Hong Kong, the migrants in this study are likely to have different impacts on the socio-political situation “back home”. The same could be argued for young mainland Chinese migrants in the UK, who now live in a society where the exchange and acquisition of information are not controlled by the state, which may challenge their old worldviews, and generate a desire for political change in China<sup>24</sup>. Such forms of political transnationalism could warrant further research.

Students and working holiday makers are only two groups in the UK’s points-based immigration system. Different categories and sub-groups of temporary migrants may represent different transnational mobility dynamics, thus resulting in different experiences and struggles relating to marriage and migration, which require academic attention. Advancing such research will help to give voice to the people

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<sup>24</sup> There has been intense research interest in Indian citizens who have settled abroad but maintained a strong interest in politics and cultural influences in India (see Naujoks 2013; Raj 2015). Such migrants also bring back new attitudes that feed into and shape expectations in their home society. The example of overseas Indians may provide insights into the evolution of the Chinese middle-class.

affected, and to promote understanding of non-EEA migrants' lives, class experiences, and decisions to return to their home country, migrate to another country, or stay on in the UK, especially against the backdrop of Brexit and ongoing "migration crises".

## APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Age:

Sexual Orientation:

Monthly Income:

Occupation:

Relationship Status:

Religion:

### **Background of Informant**

1. When and why did you move to the UK?
2. What do you want to achieve by moving to the UK?
3. What kind of visa do you hold?
4. How long will you stay in the UK for?
5. What is your highest education level? Did you obtain any educational qualification outside of the UK?
6. Did you have a full-time job before your migration to the UK?
7. How do you perceive your social class status in your country of origin (China/Hong Kong)? Why do you consider yourself as belonging to a certain social class?
8. How would you describe your cultural identity? Do you have a strong sense of belonging to your place of origin?
9. What do you seek to escape/avoid by leaving China/Hong Kong?
10. Will you consider moving back to your country of origin? Why or why not?

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### **Family Background**

11. Can you briefly describe your family? How many family members do you have?
12. Are your parents still in employment? How would you describe the economic situation of your family? What “class” does your family belong to, and why?
13. How would you describe your relationships with your immediate family members? Do they support your decision of moving to the UK?
14. Do you have any family member in the UK? If so, are you close to them? Have you received any support or assistance from your family member(s) in the UK?
15. Do you have any family member living abroad? If so, do you think you are inspired by your family member(s) to live abroad?
16. Do you receive any financial assistance from your family to move to the UK? Is there any financial arrangement made to make this move to the UK possible?
17. Do you think you have your familial obligations and responsibilities back home? If so, how do you justify your decision of moving to the UK, knowing that your obligations and responsibilities to the family cannot be fulfilled at least temporarily, if not permanently?
18. How do you feel being away from your family, friends or community?
19. How often do you return to your country of origin for a visit?
20. Does your family come to the UK to visit you?
21. How do you maintain contact with your family or friends? How often do you talk or write to them?

### **Life in the UK**

22. How do you see your current life in the UK? Do you like living here? Why?

23. Being a Chinese migrant in the UK, have you encountered any difficulties or discriminations? How do you perceive these challenges?
24. How do you perceive your social class status in the UK? Is there any change in your social class status after the migration to the UK? Do you think upward social mobility in the UK is available for you? How would you anticipate your social class status, if you continue to stay in the UK in the future?
25. Have you made new friends or established new social network after moving to the UK?
26. Do you usually hang out with other Chinese migrants in the UK? Do you make friends from other countries?
27. How do you socialise with your new friends in the UK? Is there any difference in the ways you hang out with your Chinese friends back home?
28. If you are a student in the UK, how do you see studying here? How would you compare your study life in the UK to the ways you study at home?
29. If you are a working holiday maker, how do you see working here? What kind of job do you have? Is this a desirable job for you? Do you see any career prospect of your current employment? During job hunting, what kinds of job have you applied? Do you think your education background and skills are recognised by your current or prospective employer? What is the ratio of Chinese and non-Chinese employees in your company? How is your relationship with your boss or manager? How is your relationship with your colleagues?
30. How often do you travel to other European countries?
31. Is travelling part of your lifestyle being a temporary migrant in the UK?
32. Why do you want to prolong your stay in the UK?
33. Do you wish to obtain permanent residency and/or British citizenship? Why or why not? What are the possibilities and constraints in obtaining permanent residency in the UK?
34. How does migration to the UK shape your cultural identity? Does your sense of belonging to your place of origin grow stronger, weaker, or remain unchanged?
35. Have you developed a sense of belonging to the UK? Do you consider the UK as your home?

- 36. Do you think your goals have achieved since you moved to the UK?
- 37. Have your goals changed after moving to the UK? If so, why?
- 38. Do you think you are given (or will be given) opportunities to develop your career in the UK? Why or why not?
- 39. Do you think you have already (or will) “fit in” the British society? Why or why not?
- 40. If you settle down in the UK, will you consider moving your parents to the country? Why or why not?
- 41. Would you imagine yourself to re-migrate again in the future? Why or why not?

**Relationship (for those who have a partner in the UK)**

- 42. Do you have a partner in the UK? How did you meet him/her?
- 43. How long have you been together for?
- 44. Can you briefly describe your partner? How old is he/she? Is he/she a permanent resident in the UK? What is his/her occupation?
- 45. How would you describe your relationship with your partner?
- 46. What do you think about the cultural, ethnic and language differences between you and your partner? How do you (or seek to) overcome these difficulties?
- 47. Do you anticipate a future that involves your partner? What kind of future is that? In that future, where will be your chosen place of residence?
- 48. If the current relationship is stable, will you consider having your own family in the UK? Why or why not?
- 49. Do you think your relationship is affected by the temporary status on your visa? Are there any decisions or planning you have to make because of your limited time remaining in this country?
- 50. If you are in a relationship with a permanent resident, do you hope to stay in the UK through marriage or obtaining a partnership visa? Why or why not?
- 51. How do you feel about staying in the UK through the help of your partner?

52. Have you talked to your partner about your temporary status in the UK? How does he/she think about it in relation to your relationship?
53. What do you think your partner will do when you are running out of time on your visa?
54. Do you think your relationship with a partner in the UK shapes your sense of belonging to this country and your place of origin?
55. Have you told your family and friends about your relationship in the UK? Why or why not? If yes, how do they think of the relationship? If no, how would you imagine your relationship to be perceived by your family and friends?
56. Are your family and friends' perceptions and opinions about your partner or the relationship important to you? How so?
57. Have you been in other relationships in the past? Can you briefly describe your past relationship(s) to me?
58. In what ways, do your past relationship(s) shape your perceptions of romantic relationship and ideal partner? How are they different from, or similar to your current relationship in the UK?

**Relationship (for those who do not have a partner in the UK)**

59. How would you describe your relationship status?
60. Do you intend to find a partner in the UK? Why or why not? If yes, what are your aspirations of finding a partner in the UK? And, how do you intend to meet potential partners? What kind of relationship do you hope to have? How would you imagine it?
61. Have you met anyone you find attractive in the UK?
62. What are the criteria of your potential partner?
63. Will your potential partner's residency status be a concern for you?
64. Being a Chinese temporary migrant in the UK, do you think you have any advantages or disadvantages in the dating market?
65. Have you been in relationship(s) in the past? Can you briefly describe your past relationship(s) to me?

66. In what ways, do your past relationship(s) shape your perceptions of romantic relationship and ideal partner?

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